

# **Improving the theory and practice of community engagement in Australian forest management**

**By**

**Melanie (Lain) Dare, BSc (For) (Hons)**

**Submitted in fulfilment of the  
requirements for the Degree of**

**Doctor of Philosophy**

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Melanie Dare  
1 November 2011



## **Thesis Format**

This thesis is presented as a set of papers prepared for publication together with an introduction and a conclusion written specifically for the PhD. The papers were all written during the period of PhD candidature and at the time of submission of the thesis for examination were in various stages of publication. Collectively, they examine several dimensions of community engagement (CE) within forest management, including the need for CE, current operational CE practices, the impact of forest certification on CE practices, and the role of CE in achieving a social license to operate. Presenting the work as a series of publications rather than as a conventional thesis helps to focus the outcomes on these important aspects of commercial forest management. Additionally, the production of such publications has enabled myself and my co-authors to share research outcomes with our research industry partners in the Cooperative Research Centre for Forestry and other interested parties earlier than would otherwise have been the case. This has promoted a greater understanding of CE throughout the industry and encouraged a positive direction for this research.

One of the publications comprising this thesis (Paper 5) is in the form of an industry-oriented handbook for CE within operational forest management. Written explicitly for the Australian forest industry, this handbook provides a comprehensive overview of CE, ranging from the principles of engagement through to the evaluation of engagement processes.

Each publication is preceded by an introductory statement, describing the paper and its relevance within this thesis. Publications are all currently in submission and thus a consistent format is used throughout this thesis.

The publications are as follows (status as at October 2011):

**Paper 1** - Dare, M., Vanclay, F., and Schirmer, J (in review) “Public participation in commercial environments: Critical reflections on community engagement methods utilised in the Australian plantation forestry industry”. *Australian Forestry*, re-submitted October 2011.

**Paper 2** - Dare, M., Vanclay, F., and Schirmer, J (2011). “Understanding community engagement in plantation forest management: Insights from practitioner and community narratives”. *Journal of Environment Management and Planning*, **54(9)**: 1149-1168.

**Paper 3** - Dare, M., Schirmer, J., and Vanclay, F (2011) “Does forest certification enhance community engagement in Australian plantation management?” *Forest Policy and Economics*, **13(5)**: 328-337.

**Paper 4** - Dare, M., Schirmer, J., and Vanclay, F (in review). “Can community engagement help the forest industry achieve a social license to operate? Findings from case studies of the forest industry in Australia and Canada”. *Journal of Forestry*, re-submitted September 2011.

**Paper 5** - Dare, M., Schirmer, J., and Vanclay, F (2011). *Handbook for Operational Community Engagement within Australian Plantation Management*. Cooperative Research Centre for Forestry, Hobart, Tasmania.

## Statement of Co-authorship

*(for use where the PhD thesis  
comprises published materials  
which have co-authors)*



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### Statement of claimed contribution by PhD candidate

I declare that the following people (listed with their institution at the time of authorship if not UTAS) contributed in the following percentages to each publication submitted as part of this thesis.

**Paper 1** Dare, M (70%), Vanclay, F (15%), Schirmer, J (ANU) (15%)

**Paper 2** Dare, M (75%), Vanclay, F (15%), Schirmer, J (ANU) (10%)

**Paper 3** Dare, M (70%), Schirmer, J (ANU) (15%), Vanclay, F (15%)

**Paper 4** Dare, M (60%), Schirmer, J (ANU) (30%), Vanclay, F (10%)

**Paper 5** Dare, M (70%), Schirmer, J (ANU) (15%), Vanclay, F (15%)

### Details of the role of each author

An explanation of the role of each author is given in a preliminary statement prior to each paper contained in the thesis.

Signed:

Date:

14 October 2010

### Endorsement of claim by Principal Supervisor and Head of School

Based on our communications with the contributing authors and our knowledge of the work undertaken by the candidate, we the undersigned agree with the above statement of proportion of work undertaken for each of the above published (or submitted) peer-reviewed manuscripts contributing to this thesis:

Signed

Date: 1 November 2011

**Principal Supervisor**

Prof Frank Vanclay

Tasmanian Institute of

Agricultural Research

University of Tasmania

Date:

**Deputy Head of School**

Dr Richard Doyle

School of Agricultural Science

University of Tasmania





## Abstract

Community engagement (CE) is an integral component of modern forest management. Providing opportunities for dialogue between forest managers and those community members impacted by or interested in forestry operations, CE enables the inclusion of diverse public values and priorities in decision-making. This thesis examines current CE practice within Australian commercial plantation forest management. In answering the research question, “*How can the theory and practice of community engagement in Australian plantation forest management be improved?*”, several important observations regarding the effectiveness of current CE practice are made.

Some 65 key informant interviews were conducted with a range of forest managers and community members. Research was primarily undertaken in Tasmania and Western Australia, although further interviews were conducted in New Brunswick (Canada) to help identify similarities in forest management practices and identify key learnings. The interviews highlighted the diversity of CE approaches used within operational forest management decision-making. Major findings include that CE is a well-established norm within Australian commercial forest management, with techniques ranging from basic one-way informing techniques to collaborative management committees. However, while CE is well accepted and adopted by forest managers, their approaches to, and the extent of CE utilisation are often limited. Operating within a highly regulated environment, forest managers frequently apply narrow forms of CE to seek compliance with various regulatory mechanisms (e.g. legislation, codes of practice, forest certification). Such practices are rarely informed by the underlying theoretical and social considerations of CE, including inclusivity, representation, power, and trust. Requirements for CE within current regulatory frameworks do little to improve CE practices, nevertheless there is evidence that the reporting process associated with forest management governance (in particular forest certification) is helping to improve CE practice and understanding within the industry. Continual documentation and review of CE processes is promoting a

more reflexive approach to forest management, encouraging forest industry CE practitioners to think back on CE activities and learn through experience.

Effective CE is often thought to be vital in the achievement of a ‘social license to operate’. This research, however, indicates that operational forms of CE have a limited influence on achieving a social license to operate. This is due to the often significant influence of other factors, including the prevailing governance frameworks, the media, and the broader socio-political context of forestry. While operational CE can help to ensure a localised social license to operate is obtained, more effort in understanding, and if necessary overcoming, these limiting factors is required in order to achieve a broader social license to operate.

This thesis is presented as a series of papers which collectively provide a broad picture of current CE practice within commercial Australian plantation forest management. Grounded in the commercial reality of modern forest management, the thesis aims to present a realistic picture of current CE practices and provide a rational and feasible guide to improved CE practices.

## Acknowledgements

The completion of this work would not have been possible if it was not for the support of many people, most importantly my family, friends, supervisors, and of course the research participants themselves. I would especially like to thank, with all of my heart, my very fabulous family. The support from my husband, Chris, was the reason I was able to complete this study. His encouragement and commitment has enabled me to travel, study, and somehow continue to raise our family. Our children, Tom, Belle and Jack, have provided me with great purpose at every turn; their support was emphatic and inspirational.

I would also like to thank my parents, Glenn and Anne, and my in-laws, John and Lesley. They have been great influences in my life, consistently providing me with encouragement (and red wine). Without their support and child-minding, this research would not have been as comprehensive, as my ability to travel for fieldwork and conferences would certainly have otherwise been very limited.

I was very fortunate to be part of a research team, the Communities Project of the Cooperative Research Centre for Forestry (CRC for Forestry). I would like to thank all the researchers with the Communities Project for sharing their ideas, experiences and knowledge with me. A very special thankyou goes to Caj Dunn, my fieldwork buddy and mentor of all things ‘fluffy’. I would also like to thank Kath Williams for her thoughtful and considerate approaches to life – she taught me to sit back and think differently, for which I am truly thankful.

I would like to acknowledge the industry partners of the CRC for Forestry (the co-funders of this research), not simply because without such financial support this research would not have been possible, but also for their interest in the research. In particular, I would also like to thank all past and present members of the Project Steering Committee (PSC) for the Communities Project whose guidance throughout the project was invaluable.

I would also like to thank and acknowledge all of the people who participated in the research through interviews, workshops, and the review of reports. This research would not have been possible without you sharing your experiences and knowledge with me.

Of course, a successful PhD relies on supervisors and I was blessed with two very capable and dedicated supervisors, Prof Frank Vanclay (now at the University of Groningen, The Netherlands) and Dr Jacki Schirmer (Australian National University). Their commitment to the research and to me as a student is the reason why this PhD was completed. I would like to thank Frank and Jacki for their time, their commitment, and their ongoing friendship.

Lastly, I would like to thank Professor Tom Beckley (University of New Brunswick, Canada) and the International Council for Canadian Studies (ICCS) for the opportunity to travel to Canada, which expanded the horizons of this research, providing an excellent basis from which to consider broader social forest management concerns.

## **Preface**

The opportunity to undertake this PhD was instrumental in changing the focus of my life, and consequently also had a big impact on my family. While not necessary a planned undertaking of my professional career, one must take on new challenges and that is what I did, with absolutely no regrets. It is important for readers of this thesis to understand the journey that led me to this thesis, a journey that was influenced by where I came from as a Tasmanian forester.

I completed my undergraduate degree in forest management at the Australian National University (ANU) in 1998. Having moved from my home state of Tasmania to study in Canberra, my years at ANU were instrumental in my social and personal development. Forestry students, over the course of their four years of study, often form strong bonds, perhaps due to the active student society, the numerous field trips, and the persistent tension surrounding forest management itself. Many of my now closest friends are people I met at ANU, most of whom are still foresters.

My professional career prior to undertaking this study was varied, starting in the management of geographic information systems (GIS). After a few years of GIS development and management, and three children later, I decided that I needed a change and begged to be allowed out in the field. My new role was that of land acquisitions and plantation supervision, a diverse role that incorporated plantation forest management and engagement with people of all walks of life – needless to say I loved it!

However, family circumstances made continuing in this role difficult. My husband, Chris, also a forester, worked in the same organisation as I did at the time making the work-home life balance difficult. We worked for an organisation that managed plantations under a managed investment scheme (MIS), and with such a management strategy, there are strict timelines and work pressures. In the busy autumn period, we continuously found ourselves passing like ships in the night – I would leave at 5.00 am for the early morning spraying operations, he

would return home at 11.00 pm after a burning operation. Too often we found ourselves reliant on my amazing cousin, Wendy, for childcare, and whilst she was very competent in this role, we decided that this was no way for us to raise our three children, and so I started looking for alternative employment.

By chance I was forwarded an email listing upcoming PhD opportunities with the CRC for Forestry. One of the projects was around community engagement, a topic I had been interested in since my undergraduate days at university, and very pertinent to my then current operational role, where I and my colleagues were continually conducting various forms of engagement activities. A few months later, I found myself saying farewell to my great job with its great perks (company car, helicopter rides, office with water views) and saying hello to a yellow wall, a desk the size of a postage stamp, and much confusion about what I was meant to do. Needless to say, the transition was difficult.

My interest in community engagement started with the Participatory Resource Management course I undertook in my fourth year at ANU, lectured by Irene Guijt and Marlene Buchy. This course was new to the ANU and represented a very small element of social science in a course dominated by the natural sciences. Regardless of my professional role, I always tried to implement learnings from that course including understanding and accepting people's differences, and the need to present learning materials in diverse ways. In my role as a plantation forester, I learnt community engagement from Harvey Cusick, an engagement marvel. Although Harvey did not have any formal training, his personal approach worked time and time again.

Through my PhD research I have been able to take Harvey's practical knowledge and complement it with a theoretical base from which improvements can be made. This research has enabled me to move between the operational realities of CE and the academic literature. In order to remain relevant within operational forest management, it was important that I did not lose myself as a forest manager, that I didn't lose sight of the realities that people like Harvey face every day. While I appreciate that learnings from this research and from the literature can make a difference to engagement practices undertaken within forest management, it is

important that I express these learnings in a manner that forest managers can understand and realistically implement. Therefore, the publications presented in this thesis are primarily written for forest managers, not for public participation specialists or academics. The journals have been chosen with that intention in mind. To some extent, the culmination of my work is in the form of the *Handbook for Operational Community Engagement within Australian Plantation Management* (paper 5 in the thesis), published by the Cooperative Research Centre for Forestry, and designed to be a reference work for forestry professionals.

I might note that in addition to the papers included in this thesis, several other industry publications have been prepared, and I have been fortunate to have been able to give many presentations at many conferences and seminars for a range of audiences. These have been useful in not only in fulfilling my mission of disseminating information and improving the practice of community engagement, but also in receiving feedback so that I could improve my thinking and presentation of ideas. I trust that this thesis (at least the publications comprising it) will make a difference to community engagement in forestry, and will lead to a more harmonious relationship between forest companies and their communities, and ultimately to more sustainable and socially-informed forest management.





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## Introduction and Methods

*(written for the thesis)*

Forest management across Australia is evolving, from a focus on predominantly selective harvesting regimes in native forests, to the intensive management of large tracts of tree farms, or plantations (Wilkinson 2001). Supported by objectives set under the *National Forest Policy Statement* (Commonwealth of Australia 1995), and the *Plantations 2020 Vision* (Plantations 2020 2002), the expansion of the national plantation estate over the past two decades has resulted in substantial landuse change. The rapid expansion of plantations across the agricultural landscape has been met with considerable community concern regarding social, environmental, and economic impacts of plantation establishment (Schirmer 2002; Williams 2008; Williams et al. 2008). Such concerns restrict the ability of the forest industry to achieve a ‘social license to operate’, a concept which can be defined as “having the approval, the broad acceptance of society to conduct its activities” (Joyce & Thompson 2000, p. 7). A social license is usually granted when a forest management organisation’s social values and forest management practices satisfy the accepted norms of the communities interested in and affected by its operations (Arnot 2009; Siltaoja & Vehkapera 2010). The lack of a social license can potentially hinder the expansion of the plantation estate and affect forest management operations through the introduction of additional regulations and restrictions, and the reduction in access to resources (Gunningham et al. 2004; Joyce & Thompson 2000).

Forest management is and always has been “a dynamic interaction of people, science, forests, markets and technologies, all constantly shaping and reshaping the evolution of forestry place by place” (Salwasser 2005, p. viii). This dynamic environment of interacting commercial and social pressures highlights the challenges faced by forest managers, who must try to meet evolving social expectations (Howe et al. 2005). The difficulties faced by forest managers in understanding and meeting this diversity of often competing social expectations highlights the importance of methods that can assist them in doing this, and thus

the need for more effective community engagement (CE) within forest management (Lee et al. 1990).

The term ‘community engagement’ is commonly used within Australia to describe a wide range of public participation or public involvement activities (Dare et al. 2008; Community Engagement Network 2005; Eversole & Martin 2005). It is important to recognise however that some authors perceive these terms to refer to different levels of activity and decision-making roles within a defined process. Aslin and Brown (2004), for example, perceive participation as the simple act of participating, such as writing letters or attending events. They believe engagement goes further than participation, with engagement implying a “commitment to a process which has decisions and resulting actions” (p.4). The International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) refers to public participation as being the involvement of individuals and groups using various levels of involvement from “passive participation or information reception (a unidirectional form of participation), to participation through consultation (such as public hearings and open-houses), to interactive participation (such as workshops, negotiation, mediation and even co-management)” (IAP2 2006, p.1), with this latter category perhaps falling well into the Aslin and Brown definition of engagement. This broad approach to participation activities and the often interchangeable terminology is well accepted, with participation practitioners typically taking the time at the beginning of any process to define and clarify with participants what definition of CE will be adopted for their specific process in consideration of the objectives and preferred outcomes. In consideration of the familiarity of the term CE within the Australian context, and the acceptance of the broad notion of CE by practitioners, this research uses the term CE and participation interchangeably to describe the range of activities undertaken to inform, consult, involve or engage community members in forest management decision-making processes. Recognising that a broad notion of CE can hide the important differences, further clarification of the various levels of engagement is provided throughout the papers presented in this thesis where necessary.

CE within forest management includes identifying and communicating with stakeholders who are interested in, affected by, and/or can influence proposed

forest operations. CE activities provide an opportunity for forest managers and community members to share concerns and knowledge, working together towards mutually acceptable outcomes. Such engagement processes vary depending on the context and management objectives and may include basic information provision in which people are advised of impending operations, or more empowering processes where the community and forest management organisations make decisions together (see Dare et al. 2008). This diversity of CE approaches reflects Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation (1969) which depicts a continuum of levels of participation from what Arnstein refers to as manipulation, through to full citizen control over decision-making processes.

The perceived inability of forest managers and the broader forest industry to overcome increasing social concerns and achieve a social license to operate highlighted the need to gain a better understanding of current CE techniques utilised by forest managers. This research was undertaken to review current CE practices and, where necessary, provide realistic mechanisms for positive practice change. Focusing on the main forms of CE undertaken within the forest industry, the study focused primarily on examining operational CE processes. Operational CE includes those CE processes typically undertaken in the field, where forest operations occur and people are most likely to be affected. This focus was a deliberate choice as the forest industry, and current regulatory frameworks, focus largely on the use of operational engagement processes to help identify and ameliorate community concerns. Little previous work has examined the implementation and effectiveness of operationally-based engagement processes in a commercial environment. Despite considerable review of the need for, and effectiveness of, CE within forest management (see Brueckner et al. 2006; Hammersley-Chambers & Beckley 2003; Parkins 2006; Race & Buchy 1999), and the extensive literature regarding non-commercial participatory management in the development context, there is little review and guidance for resource managers working with local communities in complex commercial environments such as forest management. It is important to note, however, that a considerable amount of work has been undertaken for the mining industry which has some parallels with forest management, yet some significant differences (for a comprehensive

overview see Leading Practice Sustainable Development Program for the Mining Industry 2006).

The aim of the research was to help understand how CE processes conducted by forest managers can be improved. The primary research question was:

***How can the theory and practice of community engagement in Australian plantation forest management be improved?***

Secondary questions included:

- *Why is community engagement important within Australian forest management?*
- *What methods of community engagement are currently being practiced within Australia and internationally and what can the forest industry learn from other's experiences?*
- *How can improved understandings of underlying theoretical concepts help to advance CE practices?*

While many of the theoretical concepts addressed within the research are related to disciplines and/or discourses such as public participation, the focus of the research questions and the overall objectives of this research are primarily directed towards making a contribution to the discipline of forest management. The contribution of the research to the forest management discipline is two-fold: firstly the research develops a better understanding of current CE practices undertaken by Australian forest managers, including an understanding of the predominant influences on such practices. Secondly, the research provides realistic and grounded advice on how to improve current CE practices, primarily through a greater acknowledgement and implementation of underlying social theories and concepts. Developing a greater understanding of both the engagement practices and the complex and interacting environment in which such processes are implemented, enables forest managers, policy makers, and other stakeholders to better design and implement future engagement policies and processes. Understanding the various influences affecting the likely success of CE within a forest management context enables forest managers to concentrate their

efforts and limited resources where they are required, and where they are most likely to make a positive difference. An improved theoretical understanding of engagement process and social interactions can help to work towards improved relationships between forest managers and the community, and consequently a reduction in social conflict.

In answering the research questions, several core themes were identified that can assist in improving CE within operational forest management. These include the need to actively consider the commercial context of forest management when designing and evaluating CE practices, the limited understanding that forest managers have of important underpinning ideals of CE, the often limited influence modern governance frameworks have on CE practice within Australian forest management, and the limited capacity of operational CE to play a role in achieving a social license to operate for the Australian forest industry. Each of these key findings is discussed in detail in the separate papers that form this thesis.

## **Qualitative research design**

This section outlines the design of the study, including the rationale in choosing the research framework and a description of the three study regions: Tasmania, south-west Western Australia, and the Canadian province of New Brunswick. The research methods are explained, including data collection methods utilised and their relevance in answering the research questions, and the procedures followed for data analysis. The ethical procedures used are described, and the validity, rigour and reliability of the study reflected on. The limitations of the research are then discussed, highlighting the difficulties on conducting social research in the complex and dynamic forest management environment.

The research questions asked in this study are exploratory questions that seek to explain social phenomena, and gather evidence to help guide the future engagement activities conducted within the forest industry. These questions are

best suited to qualitative rather than quantitative research design, recognising that to understand current approaches to CE we need to understand how people interpret CE experiences. Emphasising the importance of understanding the social world as interpreted by its participants (Bryman 2004), qualitative research stresses the socially constructed nature of reality and “seeks to answer how social experiences are created and given meaning” (Denzin & Lincoln 2003, p. 13). When conducted well, qualitative research provides rich and holistic data from the study of ordinary events in natural settings (Miles & Huberman 1994). In this study of CE practices within the plantation forest industry, qualitative research is well suited to elicit the meanings that CE participants place on their engagement events, and connect such meaning with the broader social context in which such activities take place.

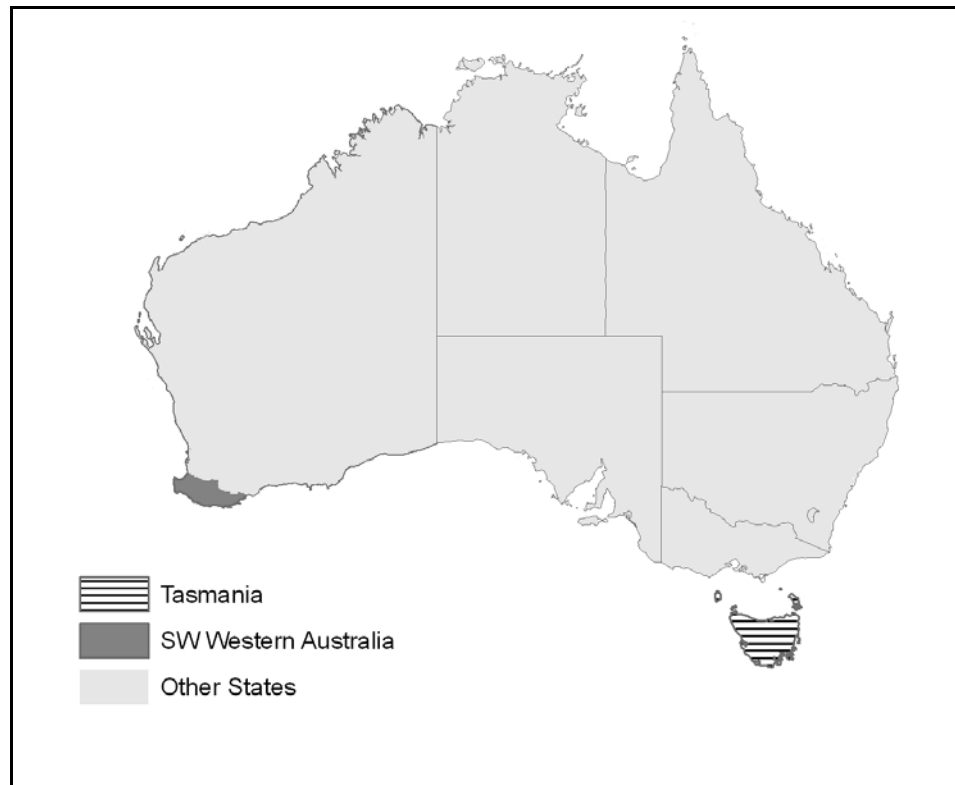
## **Study region descriptions**

The research was conducted in three regions. Tasmania and south-west Western Australia (Figure 1) were included due to the recent large scale expansion of plantations and the importance of the forest industry in both regions. In addition, the Canadian Maritimes province of New Brunswick (Figure 2) was included, as the forest industry there is a major contributor to the provincial economy. A small number of focus group workshops were also conducted in Victoria, taking advantage of an unexpected opportunity. Data collection occurred during these three workshops, however no other data collection occurred within Victoria and thus it is not considered a study region. This data helped to clarify emerging concepts, and contributed to Paper 2 and the development of the handbook.

All three of these study regions satisfy case study selection strategies as described by Miles and Huberman (1994). They are politically important in that there are substantial social concerns regarding forest management practices in these regions, and consequently increasing pressure for changes in forest management legislation and regulation. They are also fairly typical of forest management practices in both Australia and Canada. While regulations vary across



jurisdictions, the general forest management ethos and CE practices are similar. In addition, the intensity of forest management in the regions makes these regions relatively information-rich, helping to improve the efficiency and diversity of data collection.



**Figure 1. Australian case study regions**

### **Tasmania, Australia**

Tasmania is an island state of approximately 497,500 people (ABS 2008), located to the south of mainland Australia. Nearly 50 per cent of the state is under forest cover, including areas managed solely for conservation objectives (e.g. National Parks and World Heritage Areas), as well as areas managed for commercial wood production. Forest management is an important part of Tasmania's economy, producing a variety of products for both domestic and export markets ranging from high-end furniture grade timber through to commodities such as woodchips and paper. In 2006, the forest industry employed approximately 6,300 people and had an annual turnover of approximately AUD \$1.4 to 1.6 billion (Schirmer 2008).

Tasmania utilises both public and privately owned natural forests and plantations to produce forest products. All public forest management across Australia is the responsibility of State government, although Federal government policies can influence forest management investment and strategic planning. Approximately 309,000 hectares of plantation forests have been established for intensive wood and fibre production (Gavran & Parsons 2010; IRIS 2010), including *Pinus radiata* (Radiata Pine), *Eucalyptus nitens* (Shining Gum) and *Eucalyptus globulus* (Tasmanian Blue Gum). Plantations have been established either privately (private landholders and industrial growers) or by the State. Since 2000, most plantations established in Tasmania have been managed through managed investment schemes (MIS). MIS schemes utilise capital raised by investors to establish and maintain plantations, with a return paid to the investor upon harvesting. MIS schemes were implemented in an attempt to provide the necessary capital required to expand Australia's plantation estate in line with the *National Forest Policy Statement* (Commonwealth of Australia 1995) and the *Plantations 2020 Vision* (Plantations 2020 2002).

Numerous Federal and State based regulations govern forest management practices on both private and public forested lands. This includes the mandatory Tasmanian Forest Practices Code (2000) which operates under the Tasmanian *Forest Practices Act 1985*, and requires some formal CE activities. In addition, the majority of Tasmania's forests are certified under voluntary third party forest certification schemes, primarily the Australian Forestry Standard (AFS). Certification schemes generally include requirements to undertake CE.

### **South-west Western Australia, Australia**

Western Australia is Australia's largest state. Forest management is primarily undertaken in the higher rainfall south-west, where both commercial natural forest and plantation management occurs. As a result, the case study focused on the south-west region of Western Australia, extending from Bunbury on the west coast to Albany and surrounding districts on the south coast (Figure 1). This

region is home to approximately 277,650 people (ABS 2006), with agriculture being a predominant landuse.

Approximately 111,000 hectares of softwood plantation (*Pinus radiata* [Radiata pine] or *P. pinaster* [Maritime pine]) have been established in Western Australia, mostly in the south-west, with the majority established between the 1960s and 1980s (Gavran & Parsons 2010, Schirmer 2009). In recent decades, Western Australia has seen a significant expansion of the plantation estate, with approximately 311,000 hectares of *Eucalyptus globulus* (Blue Gum) established (Gavran & Parsons 2010). In addition, approximately 2,300 hectares of mixed species plantings have been established (Gavran & Parsons 2010), primarily in lower rainfall areas in an attempt to provide both commercial and environmental benefits to landholders (largely as a measure to reduce the impacts of salinity). Blue Gum plantations have been established primarily under a MIS for the production of fibre, while both the softwood and mixed species plantings are managed for the production of sawn timber.

Employing 5,570 people in 2006 and with an annual expenditure of approximately AUD\$790-1060 million in 2005-2006, the forest industry in the south-west of Western Australia is an important contributor to local economies (Schirmer 2008). A significant proportion (72.7%) of the plantation estate is privately owned and managed (Gavran & Parsons 2010), with six private industrial forest management organisations active within the region in 2010. Most forest managers have adopted the voluntary Code of Practice for Timber Plantations in Western Australia (Forest Industries Federation (WA) Inc 2006) which encourages forest managers to engage with neighbouring landholders and local government. In addition, many forest managers are certified under standards associated with the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) or the AFS, which require forest managers to undertake CE activities.

## **New Brunswick, Canada**

New Brunswick is a relatively small province located in the Maritimes region of Canada (Figure 2). New Brunswick is home to a highly dispersed population of approximately 730,000, of which only 25 per cent live in urban settlements (Statistics Canada 2006). With over 85 per cent of the land base under forest cover, the forest industry in New Brunswick is vital (Natural Resources Canada 2009). Employing approximately 12,800 people, the forest industry produces range of wood products including sawn timber, pulp and paper, with an export value of \$CAD1.3 billion (Natural Resources Canada 2009).



**Figure 2. New Brunswick, Canada**

Unlike Tasmania and Western Australia, the forest industry in New Brunswick primarily utilises natural forests for forest products, with very few plantations having been established. Forest owned by the Province of New Brunswick accounts for approximately 50 per cent of the forest estate in New Brunswick, with the remaining privately owned by industrial growers and an estimated 40,000 private woodlot owners (DNR 2008, Natural Resources Canada 2009). The Provincial forest is divided into licenses and managed by licensees, who are primarily large industrial forest processors. While the licensees conduct the day-to-day management of the forest (including activities associated with conservation, planning, silvicultural and harvesting operations), the overarching

management objectives and operational regulations are set by the Provincial Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Legislation requires all licensees operating within the Provincial forests to be certified, with most certified under the Sustainable Forest Initiative (SFI) standard, which requires basic forms of CE to be conducted. A number of smaller woodlot owners have also achieved certification under various schemes including FSC and Canadian Standards Association (CSA), which also require some forms of CE.

## **Research Design**

The outcomes of this research aim to directly improve current CE practice of commercial forest managers. It is therefore important that the research is approached using a suitable interpretative framework that allows for the necessary critical analysis of empirical data and extant knowledge. With this in mind, the research was approached from a constructivist perspective using the relativist ontological basis that acknowledges that multiple constructed realities exist (Denzin & Lincoln 2003, 2005). Such an approach recognises the important influence people's social and cultural experiences have on their understanding of reality. Within this paradigm it is accepted that there is no absolute truth (Lincoln 1988), instead truth and knowledge is bound and constructed by the socio-political context. These constructed realities are important for this research, which deliberately seeks the views of a diverse range of people involved in engagement processes. In answering the question, *"How can the theory and practice of community engagement in Australian plantation forest management be improved?"*, it is essential to understand and accept that a diverse range of realities will exist, and are valuable, in developing a better understanding of the effectiveness of current CE practices.

In reflection of this constructionist approach, the research design and subsequent data analysis was influenced by Layder's concept of adaptive theory, a "methodological approach which takes into account the layered and textured nature of social reality" (Layder 1998, p. 27). Capitalising on the strengths of

well-established existing qualitative research approaches (primarily grounded theory), adaptive theory expands the range of theory development through the incorporation of diverse learning materials. Theory is adapted through iterative analysis of evidence in the form of empirical data, prior theoretical materials and researcher experiences. The constant filtering and comparative analysis of data, and the broad inclusion of learning materials, helps improve theory robustness, generalisability and applicability (Layder 1998).

Using learnings from the more orthodox grounded theory approach first described by Glaser and Strauss (Glaser & Strauss 1967), adaptive theory “simultaneously privileges (prior) theory and research data in the emergence of new theory” (Layder 1998, p. 27). Adaptive theory aims “to trace the reciprocal influences and interconnections between people’s social activities and the wider social (systemic) environment in which they are played out” (Layder 1998, p. 20). In dealing with both behavioural phenomena (lived experience) and the systemic environment, adaptive theory is ideally placed to support answering the research questions, providing a flexible and inclusive method by which to recognise the links between people’s operational CE actions and the context in which such actions occurred.

This research uses inductive and deductive approaches, oscillating between them as new concepts are explored and tested. Inductive research is thought to be more advantageous than deductive approaches, with data-driven research providing a greater potential to discover new social constructs as it is not constrained by pre-conceived ideas (Blaikie 2000). However some agree that social research needs to include both inductive and deductive processes (e.g. Layder 1998), using the positive aspects of inductive processes that do not impose pre-existing expectations (Blaikie 2000; Tuler & Webler 1999), and the critical testing associated with deductive processes. An inductive-deductive approach enables the researcher to reflect on guiding theories and literature as data collection and analysis proceeds, which can help refine emerging theory (Layder 1998).

With social research inextricably linked to people, it is never a neutral environment, with the mere presence of researchers resulting in an influence (Easterby-Smith et al. 1995; Layder 1998). Social research involves the sharing of

people's interpretations of experiences, and the consequent re-interpretation of such experiences by the researcher. When entering a research process, researchers bring preconceived ideas and assumptions based on preferred ontological and associated epistemological perspectives (Easterby-Smith et al. 1995; Janesick 2003; Layder 1998). Such perspectives influence the way in which researchers interpret information, making it important for researchers to make explicit the philosophical perspectives and potential biases they may bring to the research.

In the past forest management training (including my own training) was primarily positivist, thus presenting an ontological dichotomy that perhaps benefits the research rather than restricting it. This research required working with diverse research participants and broader audiences who brought diverse ontological and epistemological perspectives to the study. My initial training and subsequent studies with this research allow me to readily understand and interpret these stances, thus enabling me to work effectively towards the development of a common understanding regarding the research and its potential outcomes. Through critical reflections and deliberate dialogue with research colleagues, I constantly challenged my initial approaches to forest management contexts and viewpoints and was able to conduct this research with an interpretivist approach (Bryman 2004). The capacity to be epistemologically open helps to collate various forms of information that would otherwise not be included in the development of ideas and resulting theories, thus reducing boundaries in data collection and theory development (Layder 1998).

A common measure of research quality is objectivity (Bryman, 2004). However, within qualitative research objectivity is difficult, with some recognising that a level of subjectivity is inevitable within qualitative research (Janesick 2003; Peshkin 1988). My previous history as a professional forester made it difficult for a completely objective relationship to be maintained with research participants. Previous training and employment potentially inhibited my ability to remain detached from research participants, some of whom I knew from previous roles (see preface). Complete detachment was thought to be not conducive to the research process and may have resulted in a reduction in the level of rapport and empathy developed with interview participants. Rapport and empathy are

important in qualitative research as they encourage the sharing of faithful representations of people's understandings and social experiences (Layder 1998).

Throughout the course of the research, I have tried to reduce any bias favouring the forest industry (or any other parties). I actively sought third party review of emerging concepts and ideas with research colleagues not participating in the research. Significant effort was made to be reflexive of the growing body of work, and the underpinning assumptions, data sources, and disparate viewpoints. As part of the reflexive process, I captured field notes recording concerns, people to interview, and emerging ideas, theories and literature to chase. Such reflexivity often prompted further analysis and the re-thinking of concepts and theories. To make clear my objectives and personal perspectives, interviews were always commenced with a detailed introduction to the research objectives and funding bodies as was required under the ethics approval and documented in the research information sheet and participant consent form distributed to interview participants. If asked, I openly disclosed my previous roles in the forest industry and explained my personal motives in conducting this research (as detailed in the Preface). This open disclosure enabled concerns regarding potential bias to be openly discussed and my objectives to be clarified to research participants, enabling the development of trust with them (Miles & Huberman 1994).

## **Data Collection**

Three methods for data collection were used within this research: semi-structured interviews, focus group workshops, and document analysis. These data collection methods were chosen due to their benefits in obtaining information relevant for answering the research questions, and providing a diversity of opportunities for participants to become involved in the research.



## **Interviews**

In-depth interviews were the main primary data collection technique, with 65 interviews conducted, ranging from half an hour to one and half hours in length. In-depth interviews allow research participants to share their experiences using a natural conversation where they can clarify responses and provide novel responses not anticipated by the researcher (Punch 1998). While a comprehensive list of discussion topics was developed using learnings from a detailed review of the literature (see Table 1) (and incorporated into each of the published papers rather than provided as a separate chapter), flexibility was required in recognition of the diversity of research participants' roles and experiences. In addition, emerging concepts from concurrent data capture and data analysis were used to develop further questions that allowed for the necessary exploration of varying social conditions (Strauss and Corbin 1990).

Interviews were conducted in locations that best suited the participant, typically at the participant's home, place of work, or at a mutually convenient location. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The format was not defined with conversation allowed to flow as deemed appropriate. Where necessary, questions or probes were used to elicit further information. The use of probes helps to focus interview conversations on important concepts and outcomes, encouraging participants to further elaborate on and explain their answers (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias 1996). Questions and probes were typically open-ended, developed to suit the context of the interview, and aimed to promote rich conversation around the respondent's experiences. This flexibility in interview approach was encouraged in an attempt to solicit the rich and contextual information that qualitative research depends on. Care was taken to simultaneously develop rapport with interviewees, yet retain a level of neutrality so that researcher response did not unduly impact on participants' responses.

**Table 1 –Indicative line of questioning**

<p><b>Introductory questions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Could you please explain for me what your role(s) is/are and how this relates to public participation in the forestry sector?</li> <li>▪ Can you tell me a bit about yourself and your history in this area?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Previous CE experiences</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Given your experience with public participation, would you be able to give me an example of a public participation process that you have been involved with that had a good outcome.</li> <li>▪ Do you have any examples of public participation processes that didn't work, and what lessons you learnt from these processes?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Community engagement (general)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Community engagement is a term that is used for a variety of processes. What do you think public participation is?</li> <li>▪ Why do you think community engagement is important for the forestry industry?</li> <li>▪ What are the advantages and disadvantages of CE for the company?</li> <li>▪ What are the advantages and disadvantages of CE for the community?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Community engagement practice (forest managers only)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What public participation processes exist within [region] forest management?</li> <li>▪ In your experience, what are the major discussion points that arise during public participation processes?</li> <li>▪ In your role what techniques do you typically use for public participation?</li> <li>▪ What limitations have you experienced with these past and present techniques?</li> <li>▪ What do you think are the major hurdles of public participation within the forestry sector?</li> <li>▪ What evaluation techniques do you use or are you familiar with that determine whether the public participation being conducted is effective?</li> <li>▪ How do you define the community of interest and thus the stakeholders involved in the participation processes?</li> <li>▪ How do you determine the stakeholders for individual public participation processes?</li> <li>▪ What limitations exist within your company in regards to conducting effective public participation processes?</li> <li>▪ Who within your company typically conducts public participation processes, does this vary depending on scale of management or other reason?</li> <li>▪ What training is provided to staff regarding public participation?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Community engagement outcomes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What, in your eyes, makes a good public participation process?</li> <li>▪ Do you think that forest certification has resulted in increased or more effective public participation?</li> <li>▪ Do you think that the public participation processes within the management of public forests in [region] are adequate?</li> </ul>

Interview participants were selected using a purposive theoretical sampling process, a common approach used within qualitative research where sample sizes are often small (Morse 1989, in Miles & Huberman 1994, p. 27, Kuzel 1992). While initial interview participants were selected based on the boundaries of the research, as the research proceeded subsequent interview participant selection was theory-driven, as is commonly applied within grounded theory approaches (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Miles & Huberman 1994). Using learnings and emerging concepts from the literature and concurrent data analysis, a theoretical sample was derived identifying knowledge gaps and thus who (or at least what types of individuals) should be selected for an interview (Layder 1998).

The theoretical sample was enhanced through the use of other sampling approaches, including snowball sampling and the maximum variation sampling procedure advocated by Guba and Lincoln (1989). In snowball sampling the researcher asks participants to identify other people who satisfy the research participant criteria (Goodman 1961; Ritchie 2003). Snowball sampling allows for researchers to be introduced to potential research participants, which can improve participation rates. However, while efficient for researchers, snowball sampling can reduce the diversity of the sample and consequently does not always result in a representative sample (Bryman 2004; Ritchie 2003). This research required the capture of a broad range of CE experiences within the plantation industry, which does not necessarily mean that a representative sample was required. However, care was needed to ensure that a diverse range of viewpoints was obtained, and to achieve this diversity I concurrently adopted maximum variation sampling procedures. Maximum variation sampling actively seeks to identify people with differing perspectives (Guba & Lincoln 1989), improving data collection through the targeting of a diverse range of viewpoints and experiences. Interviews were conducted until saturation occurred, with saturation being the point where ‘no new information seems to emerge’ (Strauss & Corbin 1998, p. 136).

Interviews were conducted with a range of forest managers and community members either impacted by or interested in forest management operations. Shown in Table 2, forest managers interviewed included field foresters and senior managers, with a particular focus on those forest managers who were actively

involved in either conducting CE processes, or setting corporate CE policies and procedures. Community members included local residents who had participated in CE activities, representatives of local and State governments, and representatives of interested stakeholder groups. The diversity of research participants and the range of forest management organisations represented resulted in a comprehensive overview of current CE practices within the Australian plantation industry.

**Table 2 – List of interview participants**

<b>Type of participant</b>	<b>Study Region</b>		
	<b>TAS</b>	<b>WA</b>	<b>NB</b>
Forest Manager (Private)	10	7	4
Forest Manager (Public)	4	5	2
Community	4	7	2
Government	3	2	2
Stakeholder group	1	3	9*
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>19</b>

\*Includes researchers

As highlighted by Table 2, there is little representation of stakeholder groups (environmental, social, or business organisations) in the Australian study regions. Many stakeholder groups were approached to be included in the study, primarily ENGOs with either a national or local focus. Unfortunately, there was little positive response from the groups despite ongoing efforts to obtain their views in the study. This lack of representation was not considered to be overly detrimental to the study however, as operational CE generally targets local communities rather than formal organisations. Therefore ENGO's and other social organisations are not as relevant to this operationally based study, although it is important to remember that such groups can be influential in broader forest management policies and practices.

## **Document Analysis**

In order to source additional evidence and better understand CE practices, it was necessary to review the important regulations and corporate policies that guide forest management practices. For the purposes of this research, documents sourced included Codes of Practices (including codes for forest management and application of pesticides), forest certification standards, voluntary charters (e.g. Good Neighbour Charters), regulations governing typical forest management operations (e.g. fire, noise pollution control, 1080 poison), and corporate policies and procedures.

The analysis of this documentation provided an effective method to understand the regulatory environment in which CE activities are undertaken, and ensure the credibility of recommendations resulting from the research.

## **Workshops**

Workshops provided an excellent opportunity to actively discuss CE processes. Together with Dr Jacki Schirmer, I facilitated workshops on community engagement and conflict management, and used this process to gather research data. The workshops included sessions that acted as a form of focus group, where group discussion was facilitated with a diverse group of interested stakeholders (Kasemir et al. 2003). In total, over 120 participants attended six half day workshops, three in Victoria (July 2007) and three in Tasmania (October 2008). A diversity of participants attended including people from both public and private forest management organisations, stakeholders groups and local government.

The workshops were designed with the dual purposes of providing CE training for forest managers and data collection for the purpose of this research. This purpose was made clear at the beginning of each workshop and all participants were asked to complete a research participation consent form. In order to reduce the influence of CE training on the discussions used for research, the research component was

completed first. The workshops were audio-recorded, with only those sections relevant to the research transcribed.

Using the developing knowledge of the research questions, the workshops focused on both general questions and key concepts emerging from the interview data analysis. Operating much like a focus group, the group discussions were guided around the key questions, using the group dynamics to elicit multiple perspectives (Kasemir et al. 2003). Understanding that generalisability can be problematic in qualitative research (Patton 1990), the workshops provided an excellent opportunity to capturing a broad range of responses from a diverse range of participants, and thus helped to improve the generalisability of the research outcomes.

## **Data Analysis**

The aim of the data analysis was to comprehensively review current experiences with CE processes conducted as part of plantation forest management, and provide recommendations as to how to improve such processes for future engagement activities. Data analysis occurred over a period of 30 months from 2007 to 2009, commencing with the review of interview and workshop transcripts as they became available. Reading through the transcripts prior to deliberate analysis and coding was helpful to re-familiarise myself with the interviewee and the context of the interview. On the second reading, full data analysis occurred (as described below), including the development of a memo document that recorded the key ideas and concepts that derived from the interview, including recognised similarities and differences from other interviews of similar categories.

Data analysis was assisted by the use of QSR NVivo 7, computer software specifically designed for the analysis of qualitative data. Computer software such as NVivo can be beneficial for developing theory in qualitative research, providing tools for effective for visualisation and analysis (Strauss & Corbin 1998). The use of computers for data analysis does not replace analysis procedures which remain reliant on the skill of the researcher, instead such

software helps to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of analysis (Bazeley 2007; Kelle 1997; Pandit 1996). NVivo supports qualitative data analysis through improved data management and storage, effective data querying, modelling and reporting capacities (Bazeley 2007). In addition, NVivo allows for easy organisation of emerging ideas and theories through the ready access to conceptual and theoretical knowledge, and empirical data (Bazeley 2007).

Concerns have been raised regarding the impact of computer assisted data analysis on methodology, including the risk of researchers becoming distanced from their data, and the dominance of coding and retrieval methods that may inappropriately mechanise data analysis (Bazeley 2007; Kelle 1997). To reduce potential for this to occur, data analysis was conducted throughout the research period, continually coding, reflecting and integrating new empirical data and learnings from the literature. This broke up the mechanised task of data coding, and allowed a reflexive approach to the data analysis that promoted a holistic view of the research questions and data sources.

The analysis process utilised the constant comparative method described by Strauss and Corbin (1990, p. 102) where “data is broken down into discrete parts, closely examined, and compared for similarities and differences”. Using systematic steps, the constant comparative method concurrently codes new data and compares it with previous records within the same category (Glaser & Strauss 1967). Data coding is the assignment of tags or labels to text to help identify, retrieve and organise relevant text ‘chunks’ (Miles & Huberman 1994). Codes can be descriptive, describing phenomena, or they can be interpretive where they represent more analytical concepts. Text selected for coding of the interview data was typically at a sentence or even paragraph level, rather than individual words or select phrases. I wanted to leave as much context as I could with the coded text to constantly remind myself in subsequent analysis of context and consequently minimise researcher intervention through selectiveness. Examples of codes used within the research are provided in Table 3. Tree nodes depict broader, overarching concepts or emerging ideas, with branch nodes created off tree nodes to allowing for the further exploration of these concepts, collating related data into more discrete topics or concepts.

The coding approach taken in this research was comprehensive with both descriptive and interpretive coding completed simultaneously. Descriptive coding allowed for the easy initial comparison and categorisation of interview participants and basic details, while interpretative coding allowed for more depth in both the integration of new and prior knowledge, and the development of a greater theoretical understanding of the social context being shared. Additional codes were added where necessary, reflecting new learnings and emerging concepts. Redundant codes were removed as the coding framework evolved, narrowing broad concepts, or combining overlapping themes.

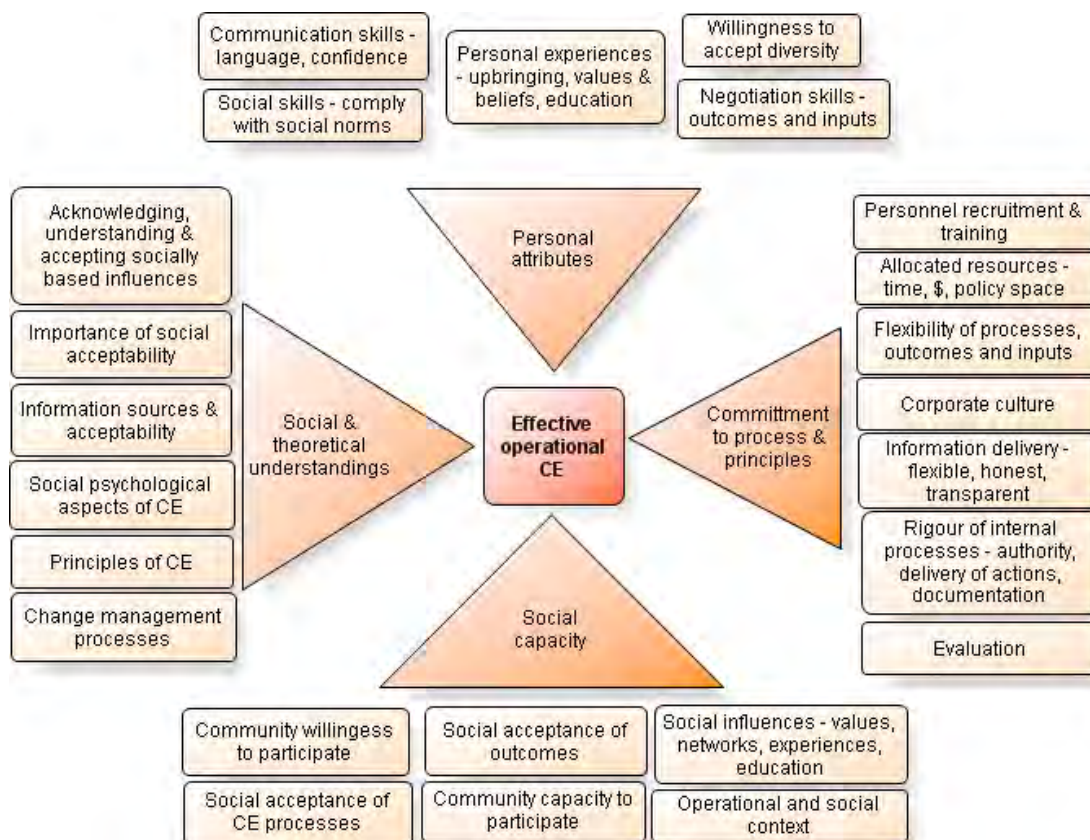
Using the constant comparative approach, continual comparisons were made between new and old data and categories, identifying similarities, differences and emerging concepts. This iterative approach to data analysis provided a good understanding of the data and assisted in the development of emergent theories.

Given the complexity associated with adequately answering the research questions, a greater understanding of personal and external interactions occurring within CE processes and forest management systems was required. Using an explanation-building approach (Yin 2003) to analyse the broad collection of data, I explored the interview narratives and relationships within the coding framework to identify the important influences affecting CE success. Utilising the inductive-deductive approach, evidence from the interview data and the literature was used to create a series of models within NVivo to help understand the links and influences on operational CE (see examples given in Figure 3).



**Table 3. Example of codes used within data analysis**

<b>Category/ Node</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Example of interview comment under relevant nodes</b>
<b>CE techniques</b>	Descriptive node designed to store comment for various types of CE techniques, or key elements of CE activities used within forest management (tree node with multiple branches)	<b>Advisory committee:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“We have had what we call a stakeholder group for many many years and probably it, by the time John* got involved it was starting to get a little stagnant” (* not his real name)</li> </ul> <b>Level of engagement:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“Well, it’s pretty much depending on the ... the ... the type of issue. If it’s fencing, they would just be done at the area forester level. So you’d get a contact from a landowner that he wants a fence replaced.”</li> </ul>
<b>Forest management</b>	Descriptive node that stores comment and information on aspects of forest management that impact CE (tree node with multiple branches)	<b>Adequate resources</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“But our problem has always been resourcing and doing that and doing that well because I think you’ve really got to have good trained people to actually do that. But we certainly see that as a bit of a gap that needs to be addressed.”</li> </ul> <b>Skill development</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“So I think one of the things that’s happened in my time here is that every employee, all 100 in the district, are equipped to deal with comments, complaints, requests, compliments, all those things instead of referring them all to myself or the senior forest manager.”</li> </ul>
<b>Why conduct CE?</b>	Descriptive node that captures comment on why CE is important within forest management (tree node with multiple branches)	<b>Access to decision making</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“So they were the recipients of the frustration of the people who didn’t have an avenue to enter into our ... more of our policy level system”</li> </ul> <b>Legislation and regulations</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“Well through the notification process of a lot of our operations, through the FBP process where by all neighbours within 100 metres of our operations are notified of intent to develop a plantation and also that applies to harvesting as well.”</li> </ul>
<b>Operational realities</b>	Interpretative code that is designed to collect evidence of emerging issue – the problems associated with working in dynamic social environments (branch node)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“We are just trying to do activities that will interest the group to actually come. That is the problem is getting people to come, people don’t come out” – reflects the difficulties in getting people to become involved in CE activities</li> <li>“what they are getting input on is industry asked for a number of things in 2001 and here it is 2007 and they are still studying it” – highlights the problems associated with long time frames in forest management</li> </ul>
<b>Professional conditioning</b>	Interpretative code collecting evidence of limitations of current practices (branch node)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“So what we have done over the years in consultation is attempt to educate them as much as possible because until you do some level of education, then probably the input that you will get are limited.”</li> <li>“The thing that I found mostly to be valuable is that I don’t know anything about the Blue Gum plantation industry, so I’m not a forester and I found that really useful in this role because I can actually look from the outside in and I can look from a community point of view”</li> </ul>



**Figure 3. Model of key influences on effective operational community engagement within forest management**

Working much like a mind-map, the models capture the key elements and outcomes that are important within operational CE. Such visual models can help the researcher to efficiently create a holistic picture of the research problem, and simultaneously create new conceptual frameworks that reorganise and redefine previous ideas and generate new concepts (Buzan & Buzan 1995). The models were not created as a group process, rather as an individual reflexive exercise by the researcher to better make sense of, and categorise, the large volume of rich data collected from the interviews and workshops. A series of models were created for each key element of CE. The resulting learnings guided the theoretical sampling process through the identification of current knowledge gaps and assisting with the prioritisation and selection of subsequent interview participants. Subsequent data analysis was guided by the outcomes of these models, focusing further exploration of both empirical and literature based data sources on the key concepts and knowledge gaps identified through the modelling process.

## **Research ethics**

This research was conducted with approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee (Tasmania) Network (approval number H9218). Requirements of the approval included the provision and explanation of an Information Sheet describing the research, the participation sought, and the rights of the participant. Written consent was also required from participants using a consent form that outlined the interview format, data confidentiality and data storage processes. In the case of telephone interviews (one interview was undertaken over the telephone), the participant was provided with copies of the documentation prior to the interview and verbal consent was obtained after discussion of the information sheet and consent form.

Transcripts of the interviews were sent to interviewees for review prior to data analysis. The respondent was given one month and one reminder to review the data and make changes where they deemed necessary. A non-response to the opportunity to review the interview transcript was deemed as an acceptance of the transcript. Quotes were used in reports and publications, and to ensure confidentiality of interview respondents, no names are associated with quotes, instead broad descriptions such as *TAS Community member 1*, or *NB Forest manager 1*.

## **Research Quality**

Tests of research quality are often problematic within the constructionist paradigm, due to the acceptance of multiple realities and thus the lack of a verifiable truth (Guba & Lincoln 1994). With tests of research quality well accepted in quantitative research, some believe that there exists a crisis of validity in qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln 1995; Gergen & Gergen 2003). In response to the debate surrounding how to adequately evaluate qualitative research, Guba and Lincoln (1994) have proposed an alternative framework for evaluation that recognises the relativist view of the existence of multiple realities

(Bryman 2004). In replacing reliability and validity, Guba and Lincoln focus on the two main criteria of trustworthiness (incorporating credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability) and authenticity (Bryman 2004).

The use of multiple study regions, multiple data collection methods, and a diverse range of participants and thus social contexts helps to improve the transferability (external validity) of the research findings to other contexts. Whilst it is impossible to include all social contexts in any form of research, the procedures of data collation and comparative forms of data analysis used in this research help to identify the limits of transferability of research results. Similarly, the open and reflexive approach to both data collection and data analysis processes help to ensure the dependability (reliability) of the research, with ongoing critical peer review of process and analytical outcomes as previously discussed.

Research credibility (internal validity) is often confirmed through triangulation or respondent validation (Bryman 2004). Triangulation describes the process by which research findings are ‘supported by showing that independent measures of it agree with it or, at least, do not contradict it’ (Miles & Huberman 1994, p. 266). The credibility or validity of the finding is enhanced when confirmed by alternative measures, through the use of multiple methods of data collection (Bryman 2004; Miles & Huberman 1994). Some findings of this research can be substantiated by triangulation (e.g. current CE techniques are evidenced by multiple interview narratives, corporate policies and regulatory documentation). Other findings fall short of validation, with the use of multiple interviews from diverse viewpoints only offering corroboration (e.g. outcomes of individual CE processes from the perspective of both community member and forest manager). In situations such as these, further evidence was sought using the literature or finding similar experiences in the empirical data collected. The use of multiple cases in data collection and multiple comparisons within the data analysis helps to improve research validity (Miles & Huberman 1994). Validity is further improved using a diverse range of participants that have conflicting views, further strengthening the understanding of the social concepts and the conditions in which research findings hold (Miles & Huberman 1994).

The workshops strengthened the validity of the research findings by providing a mechanism for respondent validation, with preliminary research outcomes shared with research informants and actively discussed. Forest managers attending the workshops were well placed to evaluate the findings of the study, often knowing more about the realities of the social context under investigation than the researchers (Denzin 1978, in Miles & Huberman 1994, p. 275). Ongoing feedback and response from the research Project Steering Committee (PSC) (a committee of researchers and forest industry representatives that guides and assists in CRC for Forestry research activities) was also a useful form of feedback from industry informants. Representing a diverse range of organisations and expertise, the PSC provided comment on informal research updates and technical reports. Such a continual process of feedback can, and perhaps did, result in a change of informant's behaviour, in this case their implementation of CE practices. Some workshop participants were involved in earlier research interviews and/or the PSC. Comparison of the earliest interviews conducted and subsequent workshops indicated an improvement in CE practices over an 18 month period; however it is difficult to say with any certainty that such improvement was the result of being involved with the research. Other external factors may have influenced this improvement, including the rising importance of forest certification and associated requirements for CE.

## **Conclusion**

In answering the research questions it is hoped that this research is successful in improving the theory and practice of CE within Australian plantation forestry. The design and implementation of the research has provided a solid base from which improvements can be made and acknowledged. The inclusion of the forest industry throughout the study has helped to disseminate the research findings in an applied and contextual manner, benefiting both the researchers and forest managers working with communities. Effort is now required from forest managers and researchers alike to continue the relationships developed over the course of

this research, promoting ongoing learning and adaptation of CE processes within forest management.

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## **Paper 1**

### **Public participation in commercial environments: Critical reflections on community engagement methods utilised in the Australian plantation forestry industry**

Dare, M., Vanclay, F., and Schirmer, J (in review) “Public participation in commercial environments: Critical reflections on community engagement methods utilised in the Australian plantation forestry industry”. *Australian Forestry*, paper re-submitted October 2011.

This first paper provides an overview of current public participation techniques used within plantation forestry. Drawing on the broader CE literature, the paper critically reviews industry-based CE practices and provides recommendations for improvements in CE practice. The paper serves as an introduction to CE within the commercial environment of forest management, introducing the complexities associated with conducting CE in a corporate rather than a developmental or government oriented paradigm. Whilst I am the primary author of this paper, Prof Vanclay and Dr Schirmer provided extensive support in the review and editing of the final paper.

This paper is placed first in this thesis in order to provide a backdrop to CE practices currently undertaken within Australian plantation forest management. The social and regulatory pressures for CE are discussed, and common engagement techniques identified. Critical review of common engagement practices is provided, with consideration of the operational contexts common to forest managers.



# **Public participation in commercial environments: Critical reflections on community engagement methods utilised in the Australian plantation forestry industry**

## **Summary**

Social concerns surrounding commercial plantation forest management practices in Australia have resulted in calls for more participatory forms of forest management decision-making. Public participation, or community engagement (CE), processes provide opportunities for impacted and interested community members to voice their concerns over proposed plantation management activities, share relevant information and influence decision-making processes. A large body of literature provides ample support for the implementation of more participatory forms of resource management. However, the literature provides little guidance for the implementation of such processes within the commercial domain of plantation forest management. Based on a review of the public participation literature and key informant interviews, we highlight the gaps between CE in practice in Australian commercial plantation management, and the theoretical objectives of CE - trust, process flexibility, inclusivity and representation. These gaps stem from the need to implement CE techniques in a way that recognises the commercial and regulatory realities of plantation forest management. While current participatory techniques implemented by plantation managers meet some of the ideal objectives of ‘good’ participation, there is room for improvement; however, this improvement can only take place if CE practitioners recognise and address the commercial realities of CE implementation within plantation management, and acknowledge the limited practical applicability of some theoretical objectives.

## Introduction

The establishment of plantations in agricultural landscapes has met with concern over perceived environmental and social impacts (Schirmer 2002; Williams 2008; Williams 2011). Some rural residents question the willingness and capacity of the forest industry to act in the best interests of the community, highlighting the need for plantations managers to improve their public participation processes. Public participation is an umbrella term, often used interchangeably with ‘community engagement’ (CE), to describe actions taken to involve communities and interest groups in deliberation around issues that affect them (Aslin & Brown 2004; Eversole & Martin 2005; Dare *et al.* 2011b). The diversity of participatory techniques used make it difficult to define public participation, however, in forest management it is generally agreed to include “any situation where people other than resource management professionals and tenure holders in forest decision-making are invited to give opinions on any matter in the decision process” (CIF/IFC 1998, in Hammersley-Chambers & Beckley 2003, p.136).

This paper critiques current operational CE practices used by Australian commercial plantation managers based the objectives of CE described in the literature, namely trust, process flexibility, inclusivity and representation (see Beierle & Cayford 2002; Aslin and Brown 2004; Borrini-Feyerabend & Tarnowski 2005; Woolcock & Brown 2005). Commercial plantation management refers to the management of plantations for economic return, although some plantations are managed for multiple purposes that also include conservation and recreation. We focus on plantation management as this enables a focus on the unique CE issues associated with this form of forestry.. While likely relevant to native forest management, the issues examined may not apply in all cases across all forest sectors.

While a large body of literature recommends particular participatory tools and techniques and provides a strong moral justification for conducting participatory approaches, relatively little literature examines the practical application of



participatory processes within Australian commercial plantation management. We address this gap by firstly describing why CE is important, and identifying the objectives of CE within Australian commercial plantation management. We then examine CE processes adopted by plantation managers, and explore the challenges and opportunities involved in undertaking CE within this commercial business environment. We do not seek to evaluate the outcomes of these processes, but rather the challenges of CE implementation. Recommendations are provided to help improve the implementation of operational CE practices within plantation management, aiming to ensure that CE remains pragmatic and beneficial for all participants.

## **The growing importance of community engagement**

Terms like community, community engagement (CE) and forest management mean different things to different people; it is therefore important that we define what we mean by these terms for the purposes of this paper. In addition to the CE definition provided earlier, we define the complex construct of ‘community’ as a group involved in social relationships based on either geography or interests, e.g. living in the same regions, having the same occupation, or the same ethnic background (Carroll *et al.* 2005). Stakeholders are individuals or groups who are potentially impacted by or interested in management activities, including those who can influence decision-making processes (Ministerial Council on Mineral and Petroleum Resources 2005). This paper reviews the CE processes undertaken at the operational level of plantation management, in other words engagement processes associated with locally-based plantation management activities. Given this operational focus, we define ‘community’ as being those stakeholders within the broad geographic region in which plantation management activities occur.

CE has become an important tool within plantation management (Dare *et al.* 2011b), and is argued to have potential to reduce environmental degradation, and to enable those excluded from, and marginalised by, top-down decision-making processes to become involved in decisions that affect their lives (Kothari 2001).

Much of the literature on CE in the forest sector focuses on community-based-forest management (CBFM), which largely examines community management of forest areas, based on the idea that enabling communities to manage their own forest resources will empower them to improve sustainability of management and promote local livelihoods, thus providing social, environmental and economic benefits to often marginalised communities (Hildyard *et al.* 2001; Ojha 2009). CBFM, however, occurs in a very different context to industrial plantation management in Australia, where trees are established by government or private organisations as a crop to produce large volumes of wood within a short period of time, and the objectives of plantation management are predominantly economic, not the development of stronger and more resilient communities as is often the case with CBFM (see Kumar 2002; Bhattacharyya 2009). Decision making within this commercial domain does not typically occur through consensus and collaboration with communities, with decisions usually made based on other priorities altogether such as budgeting, operational timelines or organisational approval procedures (Mosse 2001).

The commercial focus of plantation management does not, however, preclude managers from actively engaging stakeholders in decision-making, with plantation managers having many, albeit often complex, motivations to conduct CE (Hammersley-Chambers & Beckley 2003). These may include:

- a) A recognition of the limitations of top-down governance systems that cannot adequately deal with the complexity of plantation management as emphasised in CBFM systems (Parkins 2006);
- b) The adoption of corporate social responsibility (CSR) principles within forest management (Parkins 2006). The principles of CSR include a focus on the development of good relationships with stakeholders that promote continuous learning and stakeholder engagement (Hawkins 2006);
- c) The influence of neoliberalism and associated self-regulation where markets address social and environmental problems (e.g. forest certification schemes and other voluntary forms of governance) (Parkins 2006; Dare *et al.* 2011a). Many argue that CE is needed to overcome the gap between community expectations and neoliberal management

systems, and to address issues of social equity and ecological sustainability (Lockie & Higgins 2007; Higgins et al. 2008; Browne & Bishop 2011; Mowbray 2011);

- d) The need to address tensions arising from value-laden problems such as forest management through bringing a greater diversity of views into decision-making (Stolp et al. 2002; Hawkins 2006; McFarlane et al. 2011);
- e) Pressure from ENGOs and the broader public has resulted in increased scrutiny of commercial forest management practices, and an emphasis on the plantation industry's social license to operate (Winn et al. 2008; Dare et al. in submission). Effective CE in this instance is argued to improve community relations and thus help to reduce negative impacts and improve company operations (Frederick et al. 1992; Hawkins 2006).

The business drivers that underpin CE in other primary industries (e.g. mining) include operational benefits such as smoother operations; improved access to land and other external resources; and improved corporate reputation (Esteves 2008a, 2008b; Esteves & Vanclay 2009); these drivers equally apply to CE conducted by plantations managers, who similarly conduct commercial resource management operations within an often contested social landscape.

While CE can be costly and time consuming, it offers plantation managers an opportunity to seek, listen to, and address the range of social concerns and expectations regarding plantation management practices (Borrini-Feyerabend & Tarnowski 2005; Beder 2006). A failure to recognise and respond to these concerns or expectations could detrimentally affect an organisation's social license to operate, legitimacy and long term commercial viability (Centre for Corporate Public Affairs 2000; Dare *et al.* in submission). Without public support, organisations may face increased regulation, decreased market access and reduced access to essential resources (Gunningham *et al.* 2004). These political, social and commercial drivers for the implementation of CE within Australian plantation management need to be acknowledged and considered when designing and implementing engagement processes, to understand how they drive practice in particular directions, and whether CE processes are meeting their objectives.

## **Methodology**

The research was conducted in two Australian regions with a well-established plantation industry: Tasmania and south-west Western Australia. In both locations, several privately and publicly owned companies manage large areas of plantation, predominantly made up of eucalypt species primarily grown on short rotations to produce woodchips for pulp and paper production, with a smaller percentage grown for the production of sawn timber.

We used document analysis, 42 semi-structured interviews and 6 industry workshops attended by approx. 120 participants to gain an understanding of current participatory practices and to assess the implementation, challenges and opportunities of such practices in commercial plantation forestry. Twenty eight interviews were conducted with managers from six plantation management organisations, including field foresters and senior managers actively involved in either on-ground CE activities or policy setting regarding operational CE within their organisation. A diversity of plantation management organisations were sampled, including public (e.g. state forestry agencies) and private organisations, managed investment scheme (MIS) managers and non-MIS managers, and certified and non-certified forest managers. Forest certification is the certification of forest management practices against an independent sustainable forest management standard such as the Australian Forestry Standard (AFS), or those standards affiliated with the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). The other 14 interviews were conducted with community members, including residents living adjacent to plantation properties, local government representatives, and other stakeholders who had participated in CE activities with plantation managers.

A theoretical sampling approach was used to identify participants, based on Glaser and Strauss's (1967) commonly used technique. The theoretical sample was developed using a review of public participation and forest management literature, which helped identify the types of CE participants who should be included in the sample. Plantation managers were identified using professional

and personal networks, while community members were identified using publicly available information (e.g. internet) and snowball-sampling methods in which existing participants were asked to help identify other people relevant to the study for interviewing (Ritchie 2003). The goal of our snowball sampling was to ensure that the full diversity of stakeholders with differing perspectives on CE in plantation management was represented. As with any qualitative research, diversity rather than representativeness is vital (Miles & Huberman 1994). All stakeholders identified in the theoretical sample were included except one: several environmental groups were approached but most elected not to participate in the study reducing the diversity of environmental concerns presented.

Semi-structured interviews were undertaken using a series of interview topics that varied depending on the participant's role and experience with CE in plantation management. Reflecting the study's focus on CE practices used in operational plantation management, questions focused on the participant's experiences of both successful and unsuccessful CE processes, why they felt they were successful or unsuccessful, and their preferences for the methods to be used in future CE processes. Success (or otherwise) of a CE process was based on the participant's own perceptions of the CE process. Analysis of the transcribed interview data was conducted using QSR NVivo-7, a software package that assists with data sorting, storage and querying. Using Layder's (1998) adaptive theory approach to data analysis, emergent thematic codes were derived from the simultaneous analysis of interview data and relevant literature. These codes included process oriented descriptors (e.g. CE techniques, stakeholder selection), aspects of internal management (e.g. available resources, industry collaboration, practitioner skills and training), and more theoretical codes which encompassed underpinning concepts of CE (e.g. capacity building, power). Through the analytical process of coding, the interview transcripts highlighted CE practices that are both parallel and divergent with current theories of 'best practice' CE.

## Characteristics of good community engagement

The characteristics of a good CE process depend on the objectives of the CE process itself. There are many characteristics of a good CE process that for reasons of space cannot be considered in this paper, including those associated with outcomes such as distributive justice, empowerment, and the development of social capital (Dempsey 2010). These outcomes are not commonly the focus of operational CE within commercial domains; therefore we have focused only on those characteristics most relevant to the objectives of CE within plantation management. Plantation managers identified the following objectives for CE within plantation management:

- Compliance with prevailing regulations (including forest certification requirements)
- Improved understanding of social concerns and expectations
- Improved relationships with community members
- Improved operational efficiencies (e.g. less time delays, ability to implement cost effective management processes)
- Achievement of a social license to operate

This list of objectives differs from those often given in the participation literature, which typically emphasise empowerment, capacity and skills development and poverty reduction for local communities. Commercial plantation management in Australia (and presumably elsewhere) has an understandably different focus, given that many other community and government programs seek to achieve these community-oriented objectives (e.g. Landcare) (Prager & Vanclay 2010). Instead, commercially-based plantation managers use CE as an opportunity to hear community concerns and where necessary adapt forest management plans and practices (Dare *et al.* 2011c). With these objectives in mind, when reviewing the literature we identified CE process objectives endorsed by the literature and important for CE practice within commercial plantation management (Table 1). Acknowledging the objectives of CE processes within commercial plantation management is important when considering and evaluating CE processes against these characteristics. For example, some process outcomes (e.g. social capacity

building) are of little importance in achieving the objectives of operational CE undertaken within plantation management. It is important to acknowledge however that these socially-based objectives are valid and should not be discouraged in the design of CE processes, especially when they can be achieved within the constraints of the management organisation as they potentially contribute to the organisation's social license to operate.

Table 1 classifies each of these characteristics in terms of its primary objective, i.e. the intended outcome of each characteristic. Three primary objectives are identified: (1) to engender trust with community members; (2) to provide adequate flexibility in the process to encourage participation across a variety of social contexts; and (3) to ensure appropriate inclusion and representation of stakeholders.

**Table 1. Characteristics of good community engagement processes**

Characteristic	Description	Primary Objective
<b>Process development</b>		
Clear mandate and purpose	Do all participants understand the purpose of the CE process?	Flexibility
Realistic expectations	Are the expectations of all participants understood and are they realistic?	Flexibility
Inclusion of multiple stakeholders and disciplines	The opportunity for stakeholders from a range of backgrounds and viewpoints to participate in the process.	Inclusivity / Representation
Consideration of power relations	Are power levels as even as possible, or is there potential for negative power effects (e.g. coercion)?	Trust
<b>Process structure</b>		
Accessibility of the process	How easy is it to participate in the CE process?	Flexibility
Accessibility of information	Is information easy for participants to access and understand?	Inclusivity / Representation
Power to influence decision-making outcomes	What level of influence will participants have on the final decision?	Trust
Types of CE processes implemented	Do CE techniques facilitate constructive discussion and debate?	Flexibility, Inclusivity / Representation
Timing	Is sufficient time allowed to ensure participants can prepare input and actively engage?	Flexibility
Decision-making and communication process	The process by which decisions are made and participants informed of how their concerns were addressed.	Trust
<b>Process outcomes</b>		
Equity of outcomes	Will the process provide equity and proportionality in the sharing of costs, benefits and risks of managing natural resources?	Trust
Reciprocal learning	Shared learning between forest managers and participating community members.	Trust
Social capacity building	The development of networks between forest managers and community members.	Trust
Self-critical awareness	Does the process promote all participants to reflect on their behaviour and how they can improve their engagement skills?	Trust

Sources: Duinker 1998; Francis 2001; Brueckner *et al.* 2006; Borrini-Feyerabend & Tarnowski 2005



## **(1) Engender trust**

It is well accepted that participatory processes that are conducted poorly can destroy existing levels of trust and the credibility of future engagement attempts (Craig & Vanclay 2005; Creighton 2005). A lack of trust in decision-makers limits participation outcomes, with stakeholders becoming dissatisfied with both the engagement process and the resulting decisions (Craig & Vanclay 2005; Brueckner *et al.* 2006). Social trust consists of two components: (i) the competence or ability to do what is right, and (ii) the willingness to do what is right (Beierle & Cayford 2002). Trust impacts on people's perceptions of risk and their subsequent acceptance of decision-making outcomes, with low levels of social trust exacerbating perceptions of high risk (Siegrist & Cvetkovich 2000). Trust is influenced by three important factors: personal interactions; knowledge and expertise; and perceptions of concern and care (Peters *et al.* 1997). These factors can all be managed through effective CE, highlighting that the development of trust is one of the key goals and benefits of CE processes and is built by regular contact, personal ties and shared values (Hailey 2001).

## **(2) Provide process flexibility**

Flexibility is an important characteristic of public participation processes, needed to create diverse opportunities for meaningful stakeholder inclusion (Duinker 1998). Flexibility pertains to the engagement processes to be used, and also to the varying extent of influence given to stakeholders in decision-making. Flexible approaches to participation are better able to adapt to the changing socio-political environment, including changing stakeholder dynamics, evolving issues, and political realities. With interests and issues varying from community to community, it is important to design the process to be open, contextual and interactive, allowing opportunities for both experts and diverse stakeholders to provide meaningful contributions and to influence outcomes (Mohan 2001; Gough *et al.* 2003; Brueckner *et al.* 2006). General one-size-fits-all approaches to participation do not work, instead participation processes need to be designed in consideration of the stated purpose and objectives, social context, and participant

characteristics (Duinker 1998; Race & Buchy 1999; Mohan 2001). Participation practitioners need to ensure flexibility in the engagement process and resulting management plans, allowing space for alterations deemed necessary as a result of the participatory process (Kumar 2002).

### **(3) Ensure inclusivity and representation**

The community is not homogenous, and includes a range of stakeholders each with their own agendas (Race & Buchy 1999; Hammersley-Chambers & Beckley 2003; Vanclay 2003; Hawkins 2006). The inclusion of a broad range of values and perspectives in engagement processes will help to improve decision-making and process legitimacy through the increased reflection of public values and forest management preferences (Hammersley-Chambers & Beckley 2003). In addition, involving a range of stakeholders helps to create working relationships that promote the shared appreciation and accommodation of diverse values and interests in forest management, and enables marginalized groups to have a voice in decisions affecting them (Hammersley-Chambers & Beckley 2003; Borrini-Feyerabend & Tarnowski 2005). However, developing a balanced and effective stakeholder group is challenging and neither genuine nor equitable representation can be assured (Race & Buchy 1999).

Literature on stakeholder representation warns of some common pitfalls regarding stakeholder inclusivity including the difficulties in developing a balanced and effective stakeholder group, with stakeholders typically biased towards the predominantly middle-class, higher-educated and more politically adept, often called the ‘elites’ (Sandercock 1986; Burdge & Vanclay 1996; Race & Buchy 1999; Hailey 2001; Stolp *et al.* 2002). The most common concerns that need to be addressed when developing stakeholder groups include the need for deliberate inclusion of marginalised people such as Indigenous groups, the poor, women and ethnic groups, and the inclusion of those people who have little interest in the process but may be affected by plantation management operations due to their membership of rural and regional communities in which such operations occur (Hammersley-Chambers & Beckley 2003).

## **Current CE practices in Australian plantation management**

Australian plantation managers use a range of engagement techniques designed to suit the social context, regulatory environment and available resources (Dare *et al.* 2011b). Described in Table 2, these techniques range from basic information sharing, through to more collaborative forms of engagement involving some degree of power sharing. The initial impetus for operational CE is often to satisfy various legislation and regulations (national, state and local government), and voluntary governance mechanisms such as forest certification and good neighbour charters (GNCs) (Dare *et al.* 2011a). Operational CE is therefore guided by the prescriptions set within the regulations, certification criteria, and GNC promises. The combination of engagement prescriptions and business environment influences the engagement objectives, process design and implementation, resulting in a focus on consultative decision-making processes rather than the more collaborative processes often espoused in the participation literature.

While the engagement approach varies due to differences in State legislation, corporate policy, or individual plantation manager preferences, the basic approach to operational CE described by plantation managers included an introduction to community members through notification letters, phone calls or house visits; followed by an opportunity for more discussion where required (e.g. face to face or on-site visits). This process is usually undertaken at the beginning of forestry operations for each plantation property. In some instances, often associated with high levels of concern over plantation management practices, plantation managers utilise public meetings to share information with a broader range of stakeholders, or conduct field trips with interested and/or influential stakeholders (e.g. members of the general public, school and community groups, local government politicians). Alternatively, in those instances where plantation managers have established good relationships within the community, or in emergency situations such as fire protection activities, CE processes are limited. The following section briefly describes the predominant engagement techniques (letter notifications, face-to-face meetings, public meetings), which are then critiqued in the discussion section against the three primary objectives of trust, flexibility, inclusivity and representation.

**Table 2. Common public participation techniques used within Australian plantation management**

CE Method	When is it typically used?	Strengths	Weaknesses
<b>Letter Notifications</b> A letter is sent to specific people notifying of planned activities, often inviting them to discuss concerns with the plantation manager.	Prior to operations commencing; when small and identifiable number of people potentially impacted/ interested e.g. neighbouring landholders.	Large number people contacted; informative; only people with concerns reply.	Privacy rules make it hard to contact all relevant people; only reaches those people with adequate literacy levels; one-way communication.
<b>Face to Face Meetings</b> Used in a range of situations, involves discussions with individuals rather than with a group. Can be used to inform, consult or to develop shared agreement on actions.	Prior to operations commencing, on request; when an issue has been raised during or after operations.	Builds relationships; enables the mutual understanding of individual's issues; two-way information sharing; breaks down barriers; improves management though early identification and resolution of conflict.	Time consuming; limited number people contacted.
<b>Field Visits</b> Visits to plantations or processing facilities, usually taking a group rather than individuals.	When people want to learn more about how plantation management and/or processing operates.	Increases awareness of issues; neutral discussion environment; provides networking opportunities; two-way communication.	Limited number participants; can be costly; requires knowledgeable staff with good communication skills.
<b>Public Meetings</b> Meetings to which any interested member of the public is invited (often notified through media, signs in local shops, sending letters). Can be structured in many ways to inform or consult.	Where needed to provide information to large number people; when wish to invite comment in an open meeting setting.	Information shared with large number people; raises awareness of activities; provides initial opportunity to interact; highly accepted method by public.	Need to carefully consider location and time to ensure those who wish to can attend; can be derailed by individuals/groups; difficult to manage effectively; often does not allow for meaningful consultation or debate; requires skilled & well informed facilitation.
<b>Information Signs</b> Signs placed at visible location informing about plantation site, management activity. May include contact details for those with concerns to contact.	During operations; ongoing (e.g. signs on plantation properties erected for life of plantation).	Accessed by large number of people in context; provide basic information and contact details.	No direct interaction; can be overlooked in the landscape; prone to vandalism.
<b>Media Advertisements</b> Advertisements may provide information about activities; or notify and invite participation in CE processes.	Prior to operations commencing; prior to and during large scale CE processes; ongoing PR.	Information content is controlled; large number of people reached; FAQs can be answered.	Can be seen as 'spin'; little opportunity for two-way interactions.

CE Method	When is it typically used?	Strengths	Weaknesses
<b>Philanthropy – Sponsorships</b> Sponsoring community groups and activities.	When establishing presence in a new area; ongoing community building.	Raises awareness of company in community; can provide opportunities for interaction.	Can be perceived as an attempt to buy acceptance or legitimacy.
<b>Advisory Committees</b> A committee of stakeholders who discuss and provide advice and recommendations to plantation manager or regulator. Plantation manager/regulator then typically makes final decisions on actions.	Ongoing exploration of concerns and views of community.	Opportunity to test and modify planned decisions before implementing; improved acceptance of decisions; increased understanding of other viewpoints; detailed discussion and analysis of issues; ongoing nature improves relationships.	Time and labour intensive; care is needed in deciding who to involve and committee terms of reference, especially when there is tension between groups; relies on management accepting advice; care needed in clarifying decision-making influence.
<b>Community Management Committees</b> A committee of stakeholders which discuss and propose actions on issues of community interest; may be responsible for making final decisions (e.g. local fire management committees).	When joint action needs to be planned between different groups.	Develops decisions acceptable to all; builds trust and relationships; helps develop new solutions to shared problems.	Can be resource and time intensive (depending on how often group meets and actions needed); obtaining adequate representation of diverse viewpoints can be difficult.

Source: Dare *et al.* 2008, pp.9-10

## Letter notifications

A letter notification advises neighbours landholders of a planned activity, providing basic details of impending operations and contact details for the plantation manager. Information provided can be varied by the plantation manager depending on the operation to be conducted, legal requirements, and perceived social and environmental risks. The letter provides an opportunity for stakeholder comment and the identification of concerns or issues:

*“It is a requirement to notify any neighbours that something is happening and it is mainly a goodwill thing. But it allows them time to go and complain to the council or whatever if they have a big issue with it, or talk to the landowner/forest manager if they have an issue, and that is the idea of it all.” [Forest Manager 1]*

In Tasmania the letter notification, or Notice of Intent (NOI), is mandatory, legislated in the Tasmanian Forest Practices Code. The letter is sent to all identified properties located within specified distances of operations, regardless of whether the property is inhabited or not. Distances vary depending on type of operation, regulatory prescription, and corporate policies, but include, for example, those living within 100 metres of a coupe boundary for harvesting operations and within 250 metres of a coupe boundary for aerial spraying operations. Plantation managers also utilise prior knowledge of the community to target additional recipients of letter notifications. Plantation managers often use letter notifications to measure reactions to proposed operations and undertake additional engagement where necessary:

*“For operations of community interest such as aerial spraying, which is a big issue, we’ve engaged all our neighbours ... firstly we send them letters saying what we’re doing, and then asking them to give us feedback on what issues they might have of our operations. And [then] we’ll talk to them. Some guys say ‘Yeah, no worries’; others are really concerned, so then we talk to them. If need be, we go and do a site visit, and we try and prescribe our operation to avoid whatever their issue is.*

*And if we can't safely spray without impacting on them, we basically abort the operation for that property."* [Forest Manager 3]

Letter notifications provide an opportunity for initial contact between plantation managers and community members, and provide transparency to the management process by keeping potentially-affected stakeholders informed and operations efficient:

*"Advantages for notification – we send out something that gives our neighbours an opportunity to (a) know who we are, and (b) provide a contact point. It's up to them whether they choose to use that or not. ... The advantage is they know it, they can call us. It's good in that respect as there is some transparency."* [Forest Manager 5]

*"The community would say that the decision's a done deal and that they don't really have any involvement in the process. They would say that we do the minimum to comply [with regulations] and then if they ring up, we don't have to listen to them. Strictly speaking might be true, but to get the job done as best as possible, it's crazy not to talk to your stakeholders so that they're not putting hurdles in your way at every step along the path."* [Forest Manager 5]

The structure of the letter is important to consider, with one plantation manager concerned about the language of the letter notification inhibiting further stakeholder participation:

*"I think the notice of intent ... sometimes creates more problems than it solves. And I think it's a fairly sterile sort of one page. The language of the letter could be less formal. ... They [responding community members] are concerned that, because they contact you, you will see them as hostile. ... It's interesting that nine out of ten who contact you as a result of the NOI being received, do it with trepidation."* [Forest Manager 6]

## Face to face meetings

Stakeholder responses to the letter notification tend to occur in the form of a telephone call or letter written to a plantation manager. Many concerns are alleviated by plantation managers over the phone, such as those concerns relating to the timing and extent of operations, chemical application and proposed game control measures. Further opportunities for engagement are encouraged by plantation managers for more complex situations, or with those community members who are highly concerned about the plantation operations:

*“So then, you know, you usually get a phone call in response to the NOI, and you've got to really decide fairly quickly as to whether you need to go the full gambit of arranging a meeting to discuss issues, or whether you generally think you can do it over the phone. ... But if you can usually do that on your feet, then you'll either have it sorted within, you know, five or ten minutes on the phone, or you'll need to say: ‘I'll make an appointment, come out, sit down, have a look at it on the ground or in your house, or in the offices here’.”* [Forest Manager 8]

The favoured participation technique for more intensive dialogue is face-to-face meetings due to their personalised nature and ability to focus on individual concerns, although it is well recognised that these meetings require considerable resources, especially time:

*“CE is a face-to-face sort of process ... CE is pro-active at the operational level, with a high component of sort of personal interaction. Now the only trouble with that is, we've said before, that's hungry on resources and time, so we have to do the best we can.”* [Forest Manager 9]

*“Always thought about being more proactive, however, time demands that we don't actually have that luxury. ... We sort of generally jump from property to property and it's always probably easier to deal with the few immediate neighbours rather than whole communities ... dealing with those people that are the most and immediately impacted on.”*  
[Forest Manager 2]



While face-to-face meetings are constrained by available resources, plantation managers recognise their importance and the potential for these meetings to spread information throughout the community over time:

*“Generally if you do it well, it is high quality but low quantities – you do not meet or reach huge numbers of people. It can be fairly directed, it is a benefit if it is high quality [information] that you pass on, you know, if you have good one-on-one, that those people will then send the information out [to those in their networks], but it is a bit of a time delay to getting that positive return.” [Workshop 1 Participant]*

*“If we’re doing business with a land owner or one neighbour, often that neighbour will reflect the concerns of a community, or reflect some of the concerns of the community, even if that person doesn’t believe in those concerns per se. So often we can address those issues and they can relate it [back] to the community. ... And then that [information] gets out from those people and it’s effective because people listen to them rather than listening to us, which is strange, but you tend to trust the people that you know better than a faceless company.” [Forest Manager 5]*

Face-to-face meetings are not restricted to neighbours adjacent to plantation properties, with some plantation managers targeting other members of the community where necessary to ensure the community has an effective opportunity to engage and that potentially-influential people are informed:

*“I can think of one good example where we identified the [community] leader and she was a real fruit loop in some ways and she was a very dominant person and we actually picked her neighbour, the lady who had the three kids and who had her feet on the ground ... It was so successful that there was an article in the paper saying that residents were content with what we had done and were pleased that we had actually done it, so that was ultimately a really good outcome.” [Workshop 2 Participant]*

*“We talked to the local Progress Association representative ... The neighbours we sent notifications out to basically weren’t interested in*

*talking to us at all, there was very little communication with the neighbours. It was the local Progress Association as a surrogate, or they saw themselves as a surrogate for the town and their water supply.”*

[Forest Manager 5]

*“We spend a lot of time talking to councillors [local government] ... my perception is that if people have a concern, they don’t want to ring us because they think we’re not going to listen to them anyway. Right or wrong, that’s often people’s perception. So then we try and address the issues of who they’re going to call.”* [Forest Manager 5]

## **Field visits**

Field visits are a form of face-to-face meetings where plantation managers meet with stakeholders on the plantation site rather than in the office or at the community member’s residence. Field visits are seen by some plantation managers as being a valuable form of CE within the rural environment, while others are more sceptical of the benefits:

*“If it’s a specific issue regarding something that they’ve seen and they want to discuss, it often works best if someone can meet out there on site and look it over and kick the dirt and I think that tends to work very well for rural communities, in that sort of traditional communication system.”*

[Forest Manager 10]

*“[Field trips are] definitely not standard procedure, it is used on those properties where it is deemed to add value. It has to add value to the whole process and every block that we develop and there is a huge number of blocks that we develop, I don’t feel that [field trips] adds value to either us or the neighbour to undertake a farm walk or a roundtable discussion on what we are doing.”* [Forest Manager 4]

Some plantation managers feel that seeing operations helps people to understand plantation management better, opening up opportunities for community members

to talk to plantation managers and operators:

*“I think a picture’s worth a thousand words to me and that’s why I do a lot of tours. ... I’ve done it a few times, not just with road grader operators, also with truck drivers. Bring them into the [tour] bus and get them talking and it’s just amazing stuff. Very powerful stuff because they’re people on people on people, not television pictures or newspaper words ... So that’s probably the most valuable, one-on-one when you can do it.”* [Forest Manager 9]

CE activities, including field trips, are sometimes implemented prior to operations commencing, to ensure that influential stakeholders are well informed, and to share valuable information:

*“So we are initially working with councils, to get their understanding of what they are going to become involved with. We flew them over to WA to show them what is going to be involved, provide them with all the information that they want, and continue to work with them, because they are going to be probably the first point of call to get a lot of the complaints, and they have the potential to put a lot of restrictions on us.”* [Forest Manager 11]

*“We went up to the site and had a look over the operations. ... There were some issues associated with that property that the neighbouring farmer had a lot of knowledge on and that was able to be passed on to us and quite useful in our planning as well.”* [Forest Manager 4]

## **Public meetings**

Another common method used to encourage broader engagement with the community is the public meeting. Although acknowledged as being an appropriate public involvement technique and hence adequate to satisfy regulatory requirements, plantation managers are often wary of public meetings and see them as an ineffective form of engagement due to the high level of emotion and conflict they can generate:

*“Well, look, to be honest we try and avoid that one. Forestry and public meetings is a blood sport in Tassie as far as I’m concerned ... So public meetings would be a last resort in my view because they’re just counterproductive.”* [Forest Manager 13]

*“It’s a waste of time. You won’t actually achieve anything except maybe under the forest certification or whatever; we have to hold public meetings, fine. ... If it’s to tick a box, that’s the only thing that a public meeting’s good for.”* [Forest Manager 12]

*“I’ve been involved in two or three large meetings and it is like walking into a wasps’ nest, it’s unproductive and people actually end up arguing amongst each other. ... It’s not good for anyone, it’s not good for the neighbours, it’s certainly not good for us because it’s quite easy that information gets interpreted wrongly.”* [Forest Manager 7]

Plantation managers also express concerns about the representation of concerns expressed during public meetings, and the ability to effectively discuss concerns regarding operational plantation management:

*“There are people who have a passion for being against anything to do with forestry and they’re very effective at it – it’s an obsession so they find the time whereas most people who don’t particularly have any concerns can’t be bothered going to meetings like that. It tends to be loaded with people with an axe to grind. It’s not very productive.”*

[Forest Manager 6]

## **Discussion**

The CE techniques used by plantation managers are well established, but do they result in a ‘good’ CE process? Before we review the capacity of CE techniques to result in a good CE process, it is important to consider the environment in which such activities occur. CE techniques utilised by Australian plantation managers are influenced by the social environment in which CE is conducted (e.g. the

cultural, social, historical and political factors). Contextual factors intertwine to shape engagement processes and their outcomes (Cornwall 2004). Engagement opportunities are influenced by existing social and power relationships, including existing expectations, relationships, agendas and priorities (Cornwall 2004). These existing relationships can make it very difficult for plantation managers to design and implement CE processes and need to be considered when reviewing whether the techniques being implemented achieve the objectives of trust, process flexibility, inclusivity and representation.

## **Trust**

Used on their own, letter notifications are unlikely to encourage the development of trust as unlike face-to-face meetings letter notifications do not provide an opportunity for plantation managers to interact with stakeholders to share knowledge and show their consideration of community members concerns. Face-to-face processes are supported by Hailey (2001) due to their capacity to engender good working relationships and trust through the encouragement of open, two-way communication. The personalised contact of the face-to-face meeting is beneficial in overcoming historical legacies where past managements interactions and activities create 'landmines' for new CE processes due to suspicion and mistrust (Joyce & Thompson 2000; Singleton 2002; Luning 2011). Small group and individual face-to-face processes reduce the influences of existing social and power relationships and encouraging the sharing of diverse knowledge in a personalised and comfortable space, assisting marginalised groups to learn the necessary skills of effective CE (Cornwall 2004). Conducting the meetings in the safe environment of the stakeholder's home or on the site of operations, barriers related to power relations are diminished, trust is increased and subsequently decision-making is more acceptable. In addition to developing trust, personalised forms of engagement such as face-to-face meetings and field trips provide visual and spatial context better enabling participants and managers to understand information and management alternatives (Shindler *et al.* 2002).

Like face-to-face meetings, public meetings allow stakeholders to meet with plantation managers. However the lack of individualised contact in public meetings can restrict the development of trust as plantation managers do not often directly address an individual's concerns. Public meetings provide an opportunity for plantation managers to make initial contact with stakeholders and arrange for further engagement where necessary, and if used this way, can help to work towards the development of trust.

Often the benefits of increased trust spread beyond the extent of individual meetings or engagement activities. Bull *et al.* (2008) found that CE participants act as gatekeepers of information and influence other people they come in contact with. This highlights the importance and potential broader influence of face-to-face meetings (and to a lesser extent public meetings) in building trust – or in reducing it if these interactions are poorly conducted by the plantation manager.

### **Process flexibility**

As detailed in Table 1, flexibility refers to the capacity of the CE process implemented to cater for diverse engagement objectives, expectations, and information needs. While not all of the activities described in Table 2 are undertaken for every plantation established, the breadth of participatory activities utilised by plantation management organisations indicates there is potentially a wide range of engagement opportunities available, suggesting that stakeholders are given plenty of occasions and ways to participate. By using a stepped approach, managers ensure they provide opportunity for stakeholders to be engaged in the way most appropriate for them: *“you'll either have it sorted within, you know, five or ten minutes on the phone, or you'll need to say, ‘I'll make an appointment, come out, sit down’”* [Forest Manager 8]. However, it is important to recognise the heavy reliance on written forms of communication for initial contact with stakeholders is problematic. Such processes are not accessible to people with low literacy or English language skills and not necessarily flexible enough to accommodate those who don't read their mail regularly, do not live on the affected property, are tenants and hence do not often receive the notifications

etc. Therefore plantation managers need to adopt other forms of communication to advertise opportunities for engagement, e.g. through posting notices in local shops, or directly telephoning neighbours to notify of planned activities where they are aware there may be literacy issues.

In addition to the constraints of limited opportunity to develop trust and reliance on written communication, many plantation managers approach engagement as a technical process primarily aimed at complying with regulatory and corporate procedural requirements (Dare et al 2011a). While regulations and voluntary governance mechanisms promote or mandate CE, they can simultaneously act as a form of coercive legalism, with some plantation managers focussing on achieving compliance rather than innovation and experimentation with CE methods needed to improve their effectiveness (Cashore & Vertinsky 2000; Hawkins 2006; Dare *et al.* 2011a). Thus the CE process can become ‘institutionalised’, or ‘regularised relations’ (Cornwall 2002, p.18). This focus on achieving the minimum required by regulation is partly a consequence of the operational demands of commercial operations, which restrict resources available for CE, and hence reduce a plantation manager’s ability to proactively engage stakeholders. The technical approach is further compounded by the professional training of plantation managers, with the skills, attitudes and behaviours required for effective CE being different to those commonly held by these managers (Race and Buchy 1999; Kumar 2002; Gough *et al.* 2003). The professional conditioning of forest managers through their training and socialisation leads to “the internalisation and adoption of normal professional concepts, values, beliefs, methods and behaviours” (Chambers 1997, p.79). In the case of plantation managers, this can result in CE approaches that focus on educating the public, potentially favouring science and industry-based orientations at the expense of alternative belief systems (Parkins 2006). This focus was highlighted by some plantation managers with statements such as “*we need to give them as much education as possible.*” [Forest Manager 12].

By focussing on compliance and institutionalised processes, rather than on more innovative and flexible approaches to CE, plantation managers may inadvertently limit the inclusion of stakeholders through ineffective stakeholder analysis and the

inappropriate design of engagement processes. The evolution of CE processes is not completely stifled by the technical approach, however, Dare *et al.* (2011a) highlight the potential for plantation managers to learn from and adapt engagement processes conducted to comply with regulatory requirements.

### **Inclusivity and representation**

Participatory processes are not a form of direct democracy – not every member of the community can be involved in every participatory opportunity. The CE methods used by plantation managers are necessarily influenced and often constrained by business objectives, particularly the need to achieve social and operational outcomes from finite resources. Acknowledging both this business context, and that CE processes within commercial plantation management do not typically aim to achieve full collaborative management (as discussed earlier), there remains a need for plantation managers to ensure a diversity of participant goals and management expectations are catered for (Hammersley-Chambers & Beckley 2003). However, each of the predominant CE methods used by plantation managers are limited in the level of inclusivity and representation they offer.

There are concerns regarding the level of inclusivity resulting from sending letter notifications, especially if the letter is intended to be the only opportunity to engage with plantation managers. Letter notifications do not directly promote the inclusion of marginalised people, nor ignore them. Letter recipients are selected on the basis of the proximity to operations, or prior communication with plantation managers. Therefore, it is highly likely that a broad representation of the impacted community is contacted via the letter notification process. However, the narrow targeting of the letter to immediate neighbours (or those within a small radius) limits the inclusion of other interested community members, reducing the representation of diverse values and alternative management priorities. While a broad representation of people may be contacted, albeit within a very restricted geographic space, whether they decide to participate is another matter. The ‘notify-and-wait’ process associated with letter notifications assumes a non-response means there are no concerns. However, a non-response may also occur



because a recipient did not receive the letter, lacked the literacy and comprehension skills to understand the content or purpose of the letter, did not have the capacity to respond to the letter in the time required, lacked confidence to respond to it, misplaced the letter, and so on. Plantation managers do not usually follow up on non-responses, instead focussing on those people who do raise concerns. This again raises issues of representation, with the literature indicating that well-educated and articulate members of the public will respond, whilst less confident communicators are less likely to do so. With an overwhelming majority of letter notifications resulting in a non-response, more effort should be placed on understanding why people do not respond. This may result in participatory methods being adapted, for example through altering the contents of the letter of notification, or finding different ways of encouraging those who have an interest to become involved, while ensuring others are adequately informed so they are able to become involved if desired.

Letter notifications are typically followed by face-to-face meetings, however, like letter notifications the capacity of face-to-face meetings to achieve inclusivity and representation is limited due to the small number of people involved. The vast majority of the community are not included in such meetings, limiting the ability for plantation managers to build relationships, establish trust and incorporate a broad range of views into the decision-making process. In contrast, public meetings enable a large number of people to be involved at relatively low cost, however the true representation of diverse views in public meetings is often limited due to the lack of ability of participants to speak up and have their views heard (McComas 2001). Many plantation managers interviewed felt that only those with 'extreme' views are heard at public meetings.

While some of the limitations of public meetings, including their potential lack of representativeness and legitimacy, can be overcome through careful design and facilitation, plantation managers often lack the expertise required to achieve this. While public meetings cannot produce the depth of relationships that result from face-to-face meetings, the capacity to engage with a greater number of community members is beneficial for an industry that has multiple points of operation, and hence multiple communities of interest with which to engage; therefore effort is

needed to train managers to more effectively use this tool to ensure all stakeholders who have an interest – beyond the neighbours who are already contacted and met with face to face – have the opportunity to be heard.

Strategies such as the use of working groups that help overcome power issues prominent in large group processes, offering opportunities for small marginalised groups to make presentations to the group, or the deliberate targeting of individuals through interviews can work to assist marginalised and other interested stakeholders become more involved in decision-making and plantation management activities (Hammersley-Chambers & Beckley 2003; Cornwall 2004).

## **Conclusion**

Multiple social and business drivers are pushing companies to actively engage in CE activities. Our review of the literature and examination of CE practices indicates that the CE literature largely ignores the commercial realities faced by the plantation sector, where the implementation of CE activities and outcomes is contingent on achieving a positive financial return from the trees being grown. Plantation managers may be better guided by an approach to public participation rooted in the operational realities of business management. This type of approach recognises that public participation activities can be expensive and time consuming, and that to be feasible within commercial environments, participatory strategies must be both economically viable and beneficial for business outcomes, including long term objectives such as a social license to operate. Plantation managers focus CE activities on objectives different to the theoretical ideals of CE embodied in much of the literature. That said, the participatory techniques implemented by the plantation industry are barely capable of meeting the characteristics of good participation (trust, flexibility, inclusion and representation) due to the narrow focus and predominant technical approach of CE activities implemented. Plantation managers need to develop a greater understanding of the communities in which they operate and to design engagement processes to suit those communities; hence methods used must be reoriented for each unique situation. Such design needs to adequately

acknowledge existing social and power relations, effectively reach marginalised people, and ensure the inclusion of the diversity of stakeholders that exists within any given community.

Methods used by plantation managers often fall short of meeting the characteristics of good CE due to issues such as the limited skill base of managers to design and implement CE, and the fundamental differences in the goals of plantation managers compared to the often-cited objectives of CE. In particular, a regularised approach to CE often reduces process flexibility, an important characteristics of good CE. It is important to ensure that participation processes do not become meaningless managerial exercises based on the simplistic use of toolboxes or ‘tick-box’ exercises. In the long term, this technical approach reduces the effectiveness of CE in satisfying the business objectives for CE, including CSR objectives and a social licence to operate, let alone the more idealistic objectives held for CE (e.g. trust, process flexibility, inclusivity and representation, equity, empowerment, social capacity). However, it is also important to recognise the commercial context in which CE is implemented. With many individual plantation operations to consider, it is unlikely that a plantation manager will be deliberately designing every engagement process to achieve a wide range of social benefits, instead CE design tends to focus on local relationships and concerns. While not satisfying many of the broader theoretical ideals of CE (e.g. empowerment, equity, and social capacity), such localised approaches to engagement are realistic within the commercial environment of Australian plantation management. Thus, while the implementation of CE processes within Australian plantation management often falls short of the characteristics of good CE, improvements can be made which could result in current approaches to CE effectively satisfying both commercial CE objectives and theoretical ideals.

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## Paper 2

### **Understanding community engagement in plantation forest management: Insights from practitioner and community narratives**

Dare, M., Vanclay, F., and Schirmer, J (2011) “Understanding community engagement in plantation forest management: Insights from practitioner and community narratives”. *Journal of Environment Management and Planning*, 54(9): 1149-1168.

I initially wrote this paper for presentation at the 2008 Australian Forest Growers conference. Having just prior completed an Australian Consortium for Social and Political Research Incorporated (ACSPRI) course in qualitative research methods, I was feeling confident and excited at the thought of using a non-traditional form of research dissemination. Feedback from the conference presentation was positive which lead to the paper being developed for journal publication. Whilst I am the primary author, Prof Vanclay and Dr Schirmer also contributed considerable effort into the development of the narratives, and in review and editing of the final paper.

This paper is placed second in this thesis, providing a practical understanding of operational CE that builds on the previous critical review of current CE techniques. Similarly the description of a fictional, yet realistic, CE process helps the reader to understand the predominant form of CE undertaken by plantation forest managers, face-to-face meetings. This understanding provides a strong base for the subsequent papers presented in this thesis, which critically review the practical influence of CE within operational forest management.

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## Paper 3

### **Does forest certification enhance community engagement in Australian plantation management?**

Dare, M., Schirmer, J., and Vanclay, F (2011) “Does forest certification enhance community engagement in Australian plantation management?” *Forest Policy and Economics*, **13(5)**: 328-337.

The purpose of this paper is to provide a practical insight into the influence of forest certification on community engagement practices within Australian plantation forest management. Forest certification is a dominant form of governance in forest management across the globe. It is therefore important to understand the real impact of forest certification on CE practices, and what factors are hindering or helping forest certification effect positive CE practice change. I am the primary author of the paper, however Dr Schirmer and Prof Vanclay provided assistance in the development and editing of the final paper.

This paper is placed third in this thesis as it builds on the practical understanding of CE within Australian plantation management. Providing a foundation by which to understand the complex interaction of regulations, business ethos and dynamic social contexts that underpin forest management, this paper aims to broaden the readers understanding of the practical realities of Australian plantation management.

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## **Paper 4**

### **Can community engagement help the forest industry achieve a social license to operate? Case study findings from Australia and Canada**

Dare, M., Schirmer, J., and Vanclay, F (in review) “Can community engagement help the forest industry achieve a social license to operate? Findings from case studies of the forest industry in Australia and Canada” *Journal of Forestry*, re-submitted September 2011.

The purpose of this paper is to review the notions of a social license to operate within forest management, and evaluate the impact that community engagement activities have in achieving a social license to operate. Community engagement is thought to be vital in the process to achieve a social license to operate. It is therefore important to understand the real impact of CE practices on achieving a social license to operate, and determine what other factors influence the social license to operate. I am the primary author of the paper; however Dr Schirmer and Prof Vanclay provided considerable assistance in the development and editing of the final paper.

This paper is placed fourth in this thesis as it brings together the learnings shared in the previous papers, and works to extend these learnings and critically review the outcomes of various forms of CE across diverse social contexts. This paper highlights the challenges faced by forest managers in achieving a social license to operate.





# **Can community engagement help the forest industry achieve a social license to operate? Case study findings from Australia and Canada**

## **Abstract**

The role of community engagement (CE) in achieving a ‘Social License to Operate’ (SLO) is examined using data from a recent study examining operational CE in forest management. In order to better understand and work with the multiple communities that are affected by and interested in forest management, we visualise SLO as a continuum rather than a single ‘permission to operate’ granted by all members of a society. We found that while CE can assist in achieving a SLO, its potential is constrained by a number of factors, including the social history of forest management, prevailing regulatory and governance structures, and the temporary nature of any SLO due to evolving social values and expectations. We argue that forest managers need to understand these influences, and design CE approaches to best suit the social context and desired level of SLO. We make several recommendations for strengthening the role of CE in achieving a SLO, focusing on ensuring a wider diversity of views are included and trust developed through a process of setting realistic expectations and improving communication about actions taken as a result of CE.

## **Introduction**

Forest management in Australia and Canada has been the subject of social contention and debate for many years (Kennedy et al. 2007; Webb et al. 2008). One response to this contention has been the encouragement of participatory management processes that involve multiple stakeholders and consider the diversity of values people hold regarding forests and forest management (Dargavel 1995; Hammersley Chambers and Beckley 2003; Brueckner 2006). Concurrent to the continuing debate over commercial forest management, corporate social responsibility (CSR) has become an increasingly-adopted

business management paradigm (Vidal et al. 2010). CSR promotes social responsibility, focussing on business operations to ensure that corporations not only comply with existing regulations, but also achieve “good relationships with all stakeholders reflecting a consideration for the community and the environment” (Hawkins 2006, p. 116). CSR recognises that businesses are interconnected with larger social systems (Vidal et al. 2010), therefore a business’s “legitimacy, long term license to operate and commercial viability are in jeopardy” if its practices do not respond to social expectations (Centre for Corporate Public Affairs 2000, p. 29).

It is well recognised by businesses that they can only operate successfully in the long term if they have a ‘social license to operate’ (SLO) (Centre for Corporate Public Affairs 2000). An organisation such as a forestry agency or company is deemed ‘legitimate’ and thus granted a SLO when their social values and corresponding management activities meet the expectations of stakeholders, and satisfy the norms of the society in which they are operating (Gunningham et al. 2004; Howard-Grenville et al. 2008; Siltaoja & Vehkapera 2010). Achieving a SLO is particularly important in high public interest sectors such as forest management where public trust is important due to long time horizons, highly visible business activities, and high exposure to global markets (Milgrom and Roberts 1992; Gjolberg 2009; Vidal et al. 2010).

Achieving a SLO requires effective communication and interactions with these communities, as recognised by many authors who have suggested community engagement (CE) as the ideal vehicle to achieve a SLO (Joyce & Thompson 2000; Nelson & Scoble 2005; The Ethical Funds Company 2008; Social License Task Group 2009). The mechanisms for achieving a SLO advocated in the literature bear a striking resemblance to the recommended principles and practice of CE, including suggestions that achieving and maintaining a SLO requires sustaining a positive corporate reputation, good communication, ongoing negotiation, and understanding local communities, amongst other strategies (Joyce and Thompson 2000; Nelson 2006; Esteves & Vanclay 2009; Luning 2011). This highlights that achieving a SLO requires a two-way flow of information between forest management organisations and communities, with stakeholders and forest

managers actively informing each other with regards to forest management practices and community expectations. This bi-directional learning is important, requiring both forest managers and communities to be responsive to new information when working towards a SLO.

There is little explicit exploration in the literature of whether and how CE contributes to achieving a SLO. This paper examines the relationship between operational CE and SLO critically reviewing whether, and how, current operational CE influences the granting of a SLO, making recommendations for improving the role of CE in achieving a SLO. This paper concentrates on operational CE as it is the predominant form of public involvement activity undertaken by forest management organisations. Operational CE refers to day-to-day engagement with stakeholders likely to be directly impacted by forest management activities and often occurs in the field primarily with neighbours and local community groups affected by forest operations. In contrast, strategic CE involves engaging with stakeholders who may not be directly impacted by operational activities, but who have an interest in influencing these activities, often involving representative groups rather than individual stakeholders.

It is important to recognise that there are factors other than CE that influence the achievement of a SLO within the forest sector. These include social considerations such as labour resources and conditions (e.g. origin of employees, the payment of fair wages, acceptable working hours, and a safe working environment), the broader contribution of management activities to the community and to the general society, and environmental conditions such as environmental stewardship practices (Luning 2011). Operational CE cannot control, nor overcome, all of these expectations that stakeholders and society have regarding these important aspects of business. The legitimacy, credibility and trust placed with an organisation is based on the overall practices of the organisation, not only on practices related to field operations and planning with which operational CE is primarily concerned.

Before examining the role of operational CE in achieving a SLO, we explore the SLO construct and who are the stakeholders granting the SLO, focusing on how

SLO may be interpreted within the field of forest management. Findings from case studies in Australia and Canada are then used to critically explore whether and when operational CE can assist in achieving a SLO within the forest industry. We then discuss the limitations of operational CE in this role, and make recommendations for the improved practice of CE within forest management to facilitate the granting of a SLO from both local people and the broader society.

## **Social license to operate and forest management**

Although the exact meaning of SLO remains contested (Shepard 2008), we define the SLO as “demands on and expectations for a business enterprise that emerge from neighbourhoods, environmental groups, community members, and other elements of the surrounding civil society” (Gunningham et al. 2004, p. 308). The SLO concept relies on stakeholders to enforce compliance with social norms and expectations, with the terms of compliance often more demanding than existing forms of regulation (Idemudia 2009). Perceived business advantages of a SLO include improved corporate reputation, ongoing access to resources, reduced regulation, improved market competitiveness and brand recognition, strengthened stakeholder relationships, and positive effects on employees (Joyce and Thompson 2000; Gunningham et al. 2004; Schnietz & Epstein 2005; Luo & Bhattacharya 2006; Sen et al. 2006; Stratling 2007). If a business loses their SLO through events that erode trust or reputation or through unmet stakeholder expectations, the business may suffer financially as their market share is reduced through the alienation of customers and investors. Furthermore, increased pressure from stakeholders may result in additional social control in the form of regulations and increased market pressures such as product boycotts (McIntosh et al. 1998; Gunningham et al. 2004; Stratling 2007). The potential consequences of not achieving a SLO on corporate legitimacy and viability highlight the importance of, and need for, strategies that assist corporations to achieve a SLO (Idemudia 2009).

Given that SLO is a form of permission given by society, it is important to define the society that can legitimately grant such permission. As frequently discussed in the literature, the identification and inclusion of stakeholders who have a legitimate claim to represent part or all of a society is difficult (Burdge & Vancley 1996; Cooke & Kothari 2001; Francis 2001; Hammersley Chambers & Beckley 2003). Defining a society too narrowly risks ignoring key stakeholder groups and communities (with a community being a subset of society), whilst too broad a definition can result in the inclusion of disinterested stakeholders, substantially-increased consultation costs and time, and/or mask important differences between stakeholder groups. This paper takes into consideration the broad range of stakeholders and ‘communities’ that are affected by or interested in forest management activities. This includes communities of place – the local geographical communities that may be affected by forestry operations (e.g. tree harvesting, silvicultural operations, haulage of forest products); and communities of interest – often members of broader society, including distant urban residents who are primarily interested in forest management for conservation, recreation and other non-timber product values (Hammersley Chambers & Beckley 2003).

Forest management operations predominantly occur in the forest, with many small operations taking place across different rural locations. This spread of operations increases the number of communities and diversity of people and stakeholders from which forest managers need to obtain a SLO. However, complete concurrence of all stakeholders with regards to forest management decision-making is and unrealistic (Shepard 2008). Instead, a range of stakeholders are consulted representing a broad range of values and beliefs which are considered in the decision-making processes. Recognising that forest management organisations cannot engage every stakeholder, it is important to prioritise which stakeholders are included in CE activities aimed at achieving a SLO. For the purposes of this paper, we use the definition of stakeholder provided by Garvare and Johansson (2010) based on Foley (2005). This definition focuses on those people who can exert significant influence on an organisation and hence impact the achievement of a SLO (Garvare and Johansson 2010, p. 738):

“stakeholders are actors that: (i) provide essential means of support required by an organisation; and (ii) could withdraw their support if their wants or expectations are not met, thus causing the organisation to fail, or inflicting unacceptable levels of damage.”

It is important to recognise that an organisation’s stakeholders are not static, stakeholders can vary over time and between locations. The prevalence of stakeholders is context specific and dependant on a range of factors including local or national socio-political history, culture, government systems (Garvare and Johansson 2010).

The SLO is a business-oriented social construct, providing incentives for businesses to operate in a manner deemed legitimate by society. The business focus of the SLO enables us to use stakeholder theory, a theory of organizational management and ethics that explicitly addresses morals and values as a central feature of business management (Phillips et al. 2003). Stakeholder theory has two main ethical functions within business management: a) to facilitate distributive justice beyond shareholder interests; and b) to understand CSR and business obligations to the whole of society which ultimately leads to a SLO (Kaler 2006).

Stakeholder theory suggests that different stakeholder groups will have diverse perspectives regarding acceptable management activities. Therefore in order to achieve a SLO in the forestry sector, managers need to negotiate agreed norms with each of the communities they operate in, i.e. the various communities of place and communities of interest. With the understanding that a SLO is a form of social contract which requires compliance with social expectations and norms, the need for forest managers to negotiate such expectations and norms with multiple communities results in a range of overlapping micro social contracts, rather than a single contract with the whole of society (Keeley 1995; Deegan & Blomquist 2006). Put simply, the multiple communities forest management activities operate in result in many SLOs being negotiated, rather than one singular SLO as is often referred to.

For forest managers, this range of social licenses may be best described as a continuum, ranging from small micro SLOs negotiated between individual parties

or stakeholder groups within individual communities of place or communities of interest, to the broader societal-level SLO achieved through the accumulation of several smaller licenses at various geographic scales, as shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: A schematic framework for understanding the social license to operate continuum**

Micro social licenses are formed with stakeholders based on their norms and interests. Moving across the continuum, from small local communities to broader society, the range of stakeholder interests and stakeholder influence potentially grows, as described below. This increase in interests reflects the larger population base being represented by stakeholders as we move from local community to broader society. A change from predominantly rural to urban-based values and a consequent change in the political interests surrounding forest management may be observed. For example, Sutton (2004) describes how increased urbanisation

has seen a shift in peoples' values towards non-utilitarian management approaches. However, this rural and urban value difference should not be assumed, with Racevskis and Lupi (2006) finding that rural and urban communities do not fall exclusively into utilitarian use or protection-oriented management respectively. The green migration (seachange, treechange) of urban residents to rural areas might help to explain the increased similarities in value and interest orientations (McFarlane et al. 2011). With an increase in forest management interests comes an increase in the diversity of expectations forest managers must meet to obtain a SLO, highlighting the sensitivity of the SLO to its given context (Lynch-Wood & Williamson 2007). Visualising the SLO construct as a continuum involving the accumulation of micro SLOs acknowledges the contextual sensitivity of a SLO, and the need to match management practices and communication techniques to a diversity of contexts and expectations (Mohan 2001; Lynch-Wood & Williamson 2007). The continuum recognises the existence of multiple and often overlapping SLOs across diverse and interlinked communities, where previously established relationships and experiences influence future interactions (Cornwall 2004; Hickey & Mohan 2004). Rather than act independently, stakeholders may act in concert to exert additional influence on forest management organisations at local, regional or societal levels. For example, neighbours to a forest operation may be unsatisfied with their negotiations with a forest management organisation and contact a local or regional NGO active in monitoring forestry operations, or the government agency that is responsible for issuing permits or approvals for operations to occur. In joining with other stakeholders, the neighbours increase their capacity to influence forest management activities, leveraging-off other stakeholder interests and relationship links to exert maximum impact.

Recognizing this cumulative influence of multiple interactions, the continuum acknowledges the positive influence of reputation capital, where the SLO gained at a local level can help to promote positive dialogue and relationships at broader levels of SLO (Joyce & Thompson 2000). Improved reputation capital resulting from compliance with micro-contract level SLOs brings credibility and trust to forest management organisations that demonstrate a proven capacity and



commitment to satisfy the various expectations voiced by communities (Joyce & Thompson 2000).

When achieving a SLO, forest management organisations obtain their feedback regarding compliance with social expectations from those stakeholders active in CE processes. However, people do not naturally participate in social activities such as CE processes. Rather, participation typically occurs when people are motivated to do so which can result in extreme views being overly represented by the ‘interested minority’ who are vocal in their views and actively aim to influence the company’s activities (Fiorina 1999). As a consequence there can be a misrepresentation of norms and interests negotiated when seeking a SLO, with participating stakeholders not necessarily representing the broader population’s interests. In addition, the most influential stakeholders are not necessarily those directly affected by forest management activities, but instead representing primarily middle class, urban-based interests, politicians and national or internationally-based NGOs and ENGOs for example (Hammersley Chambers & Beckley 2003, Sutton 2004). Therefore, the inclusion and role of stakeholder groups needs to be carefully balanced, recognising distributive inequalities in terms of the costs and benefits of forest management activities, and the significant differences in the rights, capacities and influence stakeholders can have on forest management and corporate outcomes (Singleton 2009, Choi et al. 2010).

The continuum represents a SLO framework developed through the incorporation of learnings from the literature and empirical research, using the insights of forest managers and community members. In addition to highlighting the cumulative nature of SLO, the continuum describes the typical forms of CE used to engage stakeholders at the various levels of influence, with operational CE key in working with stakeholders with local to regional interests and influence, and strategic CE utilised when working with stakeholders with a regional to society level influence. This does not preclude those tools and techniques that are used for operational CE from being used in strategic engagement or vice-versa, yet provides a guide as to what forms of engagement are likely at the different levels of society and influence. For example, a forest manager may use a field trip to help form relationships with local residents and seek feedback to proposed forest

operations. Similarly, a forest manager may use a field trip to show politicians (who have society level influence) forest management practices to help legitimise operations and outcomes.

## **Method and background to the case studies**

The potential of CE to assist in achieving a SLO was explored via two case studies of forest management in Tasmania, Australia and New Brunswick, Canada. In both regions, ongoing controversy over forest management suggests that it is challenging to achieve a SLO, and also that there is a strong need for the industry to do so (see Baskerville 1995, Dargavel 1995). In Tasmania, there exists long-term debate over the use of native forests for the production of export woodchips. Recently, criticism has evolved regarding the establishment of plantations on agricultural land for the purposes of woodchip production (CSDev Associates 2010). In New Brunswick, a similar debate has been running for decades over the use and management of native forests for fibre production (pulp mills operate within New Brunswick unlike Tasmania where woodchips are sold to offshore pulp mills), and the lack of management for non-timber forest values (Kennedy et al. 2007). In both regions, ongoing debate and conflict has resulted in political intervention in forest management in an attempt to address the controversy. This includes the Australian Regional Forest Agreement process originally signed in 1995 (and reviewed in 2005), and the 2004 Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick Select Committee on Wood Supply. Operational CE is well established within forest management in both regions due to government-mandated codes of forest practices, voluntary forest certification requirements, and internal corporate policies and procedures (Dare et al. 2011a).

Producing a range of domestic and export products, the Tasmanian forest industry employed approximately 3,460 people in 2011, a significant reduction from the estimated 6,960 people employed in the Tasmanian forest industry in 2008 (Schirmer et al. 2011). Forest products are sourced from both native forests and plantations. State owned forests account for 70% of the commercially-available

forest cover, with the remaining 30% spread across industrial growers and approximately 1,600 private growers (Schirmer 2008). Under the Tasmanian *Forest Practices Act 1985*, forestry operations on both public and private lands are regulated by the mandatory Tasmanian Forest Practices Code (2000), and a range of other legislative provisions govern different aspects of forest management. The majority of Tasmania's forests (including all State-owned forests) are voluntarily certified under the Australian Forestry Standard (AFS), with several large forest companies seeking Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification as well (as at August 2011). CE is a requirement within both the regulations and certification standards governing forest management in Tasmania.

The forest industry in New Brunswick employs around 12,800 people, and has an export value of CAD \$1.3 billion (Natural Resources Canada 2009). New Brunswick primarily utilises natural forests for forest products, with very few plantations established. Provincial forest accounts for 51% of the forest estate, with the remaining owned by industrial growers and an estimated 40,000 private woodlot owners (DNR 2008). Management of the public forest is allocated to Crown timber licensees (CTLs) who are primarily large industrial forest processors, with significant investment and employment in local communities. With many communities highly dependent on CTLs for employment, they are more likely to grant a SLO than those communities less dependent on forest production. This further highlights the need for forest management organisations to seek a SLO from stakeholders representing a range of interests, thus ensuring that both local and broader social interests are considered in forest management.

Management objectives and operational regulations are set by the Provincial Department of Natural Resources. These objectives and regulations are only applied to public forest lands. Current legislation requires all licensees operating on public lands to be certified, with most certified under the Sustainable Forestry Initiative standard. A number of smaller woodlot owners have achieved certification under other schemes including FSC and the Canadian Standards Association. All of these forest certification standards include CE requirements.

The land tenure that forest management organisations operate under is important for achieving a SLO, with some stakeholders placing greater emphasis on multi-stakeholder decision-making processes, and the management for diverse timber and non-timber forest values within public forests, as opposed to private forests where private land rights reduce the extent of direct external influence on decision-making. This may be different, however, for those forest management organisations that own very large tracts of freehold land, or manage a large area of leased land on behalf of private landholders. The exposure of large forest management organisations to markets and political systems provides stakeholders with more opportunity to influence forest management decision-making affecting these private lands.

In-depth interviews and document analysis were used to gain an understanding of current CE practices utilised by commercial forest managers. In-depth interviews generally followed a list of discussion topics developed iteratively from the literature and empirical evidence. An open style form of interviewing was undertaken with each interviewee, encouraging natural conversations with research participants where they could share their experiences, clarify responses and potentially provide novel responses not anticipated by the researcher (Punch 1998). Discussion topics encouraged the research participant to talk about their CE experiences, their perceptions of the efficacy of CE processes, and how the CE affected their relationship with the forest management organisation or community members. These questions enabled analysis of how CE influenced SLO, highlighting the contextual nature of SLO within operational forest management. Documents analysed included relevant regulations and forest certification standards prescribing CE activities, and internal company policies and procedures.

Interviews were undertaken with 25 operational and senior forest managers from 11 large forest management organisations, and 15 community members including rural residents, advisory committee participants, government representatives, and members of interested stakeholder groups which included ENGOs, industry lobby

groups, agricultural representatives and academics. In total, 21 interviews were conducted in Tasmania and 19 in New Brunswick. The organisations included those businesses responsible for the management of forest land, but not those who only undertake forest operations (e.g. harvesting contractors). Some forest management organisations had integrated harvesting and other operational divisions, although most forest management organisations contract a range of operations out to other businesses. Both domestic and internationally-based organisations were included, with some organisations employing staff dedicated to CE, while others preferred that all foresters undertook CE roles. The period of time organisations had been operating in their communities varied from three years to several decades. The decline in the forest industry in recent years has resulted in many of the forest management organisations included in this study closing-down or merging with other organisations since this research was undertaken.

The forest managers participating in the research were identified using professional networks within the forest industry. These networks were accessed through members of the research project steering committee which included representatives of private and public forest management organisations, and academics involved in the social research being undertaken by the Cooperative Research Centre for Forestry (CRC for Forestry). Community members were selected using publicly-available information and snowball sampling methods, where existing participants were asked to help identify and contact other people relevant to the study. While snowball sampling is an efficient method for identifying relevant research participants and professional networks, it does not necessarily produce a representative sample. To ensure that no key viewpoints were excluded, a purposive or theoretical sample (Glaser & Strauss 1967) was constructed in which stakeholders with differing views were identified based on available information. At least one interview was conducted with a representative of each type of stakeholder identified. Interviews continued until a 'point of saturation' (Strauss & Corbin 1998) was reached where no new perspectives on CE within forest management emerged from the discussions.

## **Current operational CE practices in forest management**

In both case study regions, we explored the potential of CE to achieve SLO through examining the effectiveness of operational CE. Did engagement activities satisfy the expectations of forest managers and stakeholders, or did the techniques implemented provide inadequate opportunity for forest managers and stakeholders to negotiate mutually-acceptable outcomes? Operational CE includes those engagement activities undertaken as part of forest operation activities such as establishing a plantation or harvesting a forest stand. Operational CE typically occurs in the rural locations where such operations occur: in the forest, at the residence of a neighbouring landholder, or in the nearby town hall, and occasionally in local shops. Usually involving small numbers of people in a given interaction (often only the forest manager and neighbouring landholder), operational CE constantly exposes forest managers to changing social expectations, facilitating the integration of social values into daily forest management practices.

In both Tasmania and New Brunswick, community members have multiple opportunities to become involved in forest management decisions. Common operational CE techniques utilised include those listed in Table 1.

**Table 1. Common operational community engagement techniques used in Tasmanian and New Brunswick forest industry.**

<b>CE technique</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
Letter notification	Letters sent to landowners adjacent to proposed operations, describing the proposed forestry operations and inviting them to contact the forest manager with any concerns or questions.	Can contact a large number of people efficiently	Relies on a high level of literacy. Primarily one-way communication. Typically involves locally based stakeholders affected by operations (although other interested stakeholders may be recorded on a stakeholder database and also sent the letters, e.g. local government, ENGOs, residents of non-affected areas).
Telephone conversations	Direct phone conversations between forest managers and concerned community members.	A basic form of two-way communication. Effective tool for discussing basic concerns. Can be held with a range of stakeholders (communities of place and interest).	Limited effectiveness with complex queries.
Face to face meetings	Meetings with individuals or small groups, often on the site of forestry operations or in the home of a concerned community member.	Beneficial for building relationships and facilitating the mutual understanding of stakeholder concerns and perspectives. Can help identify and resolve concerns early, prior to conflict evolving.	Time consuming nature of such meetings reduces the number of people engaged.

<b>CE technique</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
Field trips	Organised trips to field or processing sites, usually with specific groups of stakeholders (e.g. local government).	<p>Increase the awareness of issues with stakeholders using two-way communication.</p> <p>A diverse range of participants can be involved (e.g. politicians, local community group, schools)</p>	The costs and associated logistics of field trips restrict the number of participants,
Public meetings	Meetings conducted in public facilities such as town halls, often involving large groups of people.	<p>Information shared with a large number of people.</p> <p>Can encourage two-way communication.</p>	Need to be well facilitated to ensure conflict does not escalate for contentious issues.
Open house	Public access to a dedicated location where information regarding forest management is shared using displays, formal or informal presentations, or other forms of communication.	<p>Provide a non-threatening environment</p> <p>Shares information through both one-way and two-way communication techniques.</p> <p>Opportunity to develop relationships with stakeholders and identify issues and concerns.</p>	Limited inclusivity of community of interest stakeholders as open houses usually occur in locations affected by operations, regional centres.
Advisory groups	A committee of stakeholders who discuss and provide advice and recommendations to the forest managers (mandatory for all licensees in New Brunswick, rarely used in Tasmania).	<p>Provide an opportunity to develop, test and modify forest management plans and operational practices.</p> <p>Promoting mutual understanding of other viewpoints and building relationships.</p> <p>Can include a broad representation of stakeholders.</p>	<p>Require considerable time and commitment from all participants involved, and the establishment of clear and agreed terms of reference.</p> <p>Stakeholder participation can wane over time, restricting the interests being represented and the level of discussion.</p>

Sources: Hammersley-Chambers & Beckley 2003; Beckley et al. 2005; Dare et al. 2011b.



## **The influence of operational CE on SLO**

When we explored the effectiveness of these diverse operational CE techniques in achieving SLO across the continuum, we found that the influence of operational CE on the achievement of a SLO is limited due to: (1) limited capacity to reach the broad range of stakeholders who need to grant a SLO; (2) low levels of trust in forest managers; (3) limited ability to influence forest management governance systems; and (4) difficulties in realizing rapid change in forest management practices. These are discussed below.

### **(1) Does CE reach the people who need to grant a SLO?**

Forest managers in both regions felt their operational CE reached only some of the stakeholders who need to grant a SLO, largely because operational CE targets and hence engages only small numbers of primarily local people with locally-based influence. In Tasmania, initial CE opportunities often rely on letter notifications; however a large majority of letter notifications receive no response.

*“Out of 100 notifications you would be lucky to have 10 [responses].” (TAS Forest Manager 8)*

This lack of response suggests this method of CE does not adequately reach, or encourage, all of those who neighbour forestry operations, let alone the many other members of local communities who do not receive letter notifications but may have an interest in forest operations. In New Brunswick, CE methods such as open houses and advisory groups engage a broader range of stakeholders compared to letter notifications. Similar to Tasmania, however, relatively low numbers of people actually participate:

*“We were thinking about having an open house again. But nowadays you have to do something that draws people. Everybody is juggling their time between getting their children to baseball games or whatever. Sometimes*

*you have open houses and it's just not the huge amount of people you would expect [to come].” (NB Forest Manager 2)*

Low participation in operational CE activities may occur for many reasons and under some circumstances it may indicate a SLO has been granted – if stakeholders trust forest managers to undertake sustainable and safe forestry operations, they may not feel a need to engage. However, continuing conflict over forestry operations in both case studies suggests this is not the case, and that CE is failing to reach many stakeholders who need to grant a SLO. This failure may be due to the often localised approach of operational CE activities, or due to a lack of trust in the forest management organisations and their approach to CE, with stakeholders questioning whether the CE is genuine and will allow stakeholders to have an influence in forest management decision-making (Singleton 2002; Tippet et al. 2005).

## **(2) Does CE influence public trust in forest management?**

Trust is integral to any participative decision-making process, impacting on people's perceptions of risk and influencing the way they approach engagement opportunities (Dare et al. in press). Achieving a SLO requires achieving trust between the community and forest managers (The social license to operate 2010). CE activities aim to build trust either through direct involvement in engagement activities, or through the flow-on effects of this involvement to people not directly involved in CE. Achieving trust through direct involvement depends not only on the CE process, but also on the social history of forest management and CE. Suspicion may be raised due to historical legacies from past interactions that create 'land mines' for current processes and create difficulties for forest managers to attract and engage stakeholders (Joyce & Thompson 2000; Singleton 2002; Luning 2011). This highlights the importance of recognising that CE activities are undertaken within unstable spaces, where existing relationships and previous experiences continue to influence current processes, affecting new engagement opportunities and potential outcomes (Cornwall 2004).

The complexity, uncertainty and strong beliefs associated with forest management create situations of conflict that are often rigid and confrontational (Bowonder 1987). Past conflicts may be locally-based and associated with previous poor forest management practices on a specific forestry operation, or conflict may be strategically-based such as the debate surrounding the logging of old-growth forests in both Tasmania and New Brunswick. The poor implementation of previous CE activities and unrealised expectations regarding forest management practices can erode stakeholder trust in forest managers (Craig & Vanclay 2005). Extreme evaluations of trust (i.e. very high or very low levels of trust) can lead to category-based perceptions where the evaluation of trust is generalised across a whole category of actors, or in this case the whole of the forest industry (Montijn-Dorgelo & Midden 2008). This generalisation of trust results in forest managers often starting from a low trust base where they need to overcome negative perceptions:

*“I feel that it [a previous poor CE process] really led to a rift between the people ... socially it was harmful to the way that our society looks at forestry and it sort of gave the companies a bad reputation that still lingers today.” (NB Environmental Group Representative 1)*

*“I’ve had nothing but bad experiences from forestry, I’ve been battling them over every single [harvest] that they’ve done for 10, 15 years. They’ve done nothing good as far as I’m concerned.” (TAS Community Member 2)*

In some instances, operational CE was successful in overcoming previous negative experiences. When asked if she was happy with the outcomes of a CE process, one Tasmanian community member described a shift from distrust to trust, indicative of the granting of a SLO:

*“Absolutely, I thought it showed that they had listened to our concerns and had dealt with them ... My perception of the whole process has changed from one of negativity and fear, into ‘I can do this’. I can discuss things with these people and I can get a resolution, or get someone to hear me.” (TAS Community Member 1)*

The likelihood of achieving trust appears at least partly reliant on the type of CE involved. Much operational CE involves information dissemination, with community members given little opportunity for input into the management decision. Some forest managers felt that this approach was effective in achieving a SLO:

*“Most groups, once you explain to them what you are doing and the process behind it, that there is some system to the madness, it is not just madness, they feel a lot more comfortable.” (NB Forest Manager 1)*

*“A lot of people in our community are still probably a little naïve about some of our practices – and there are practices which scare them, our game control and weed control. So I think it’s important that they get some factual information.” (Tas Forest Manager 7)*

Perceptions of forest management are most likely to change positively if CE goes beyond information dissemination, with concerned community members reporting greater trust in situations where they felt their concerns were listened to and acted upon, compared to those in which they were passive recipients of information intended to be reassuring. This is indicative of the type of CE needed to overcome the historical legacy of past negative experiences. Consistent with findings of other research, we found a greater level of trust is developed when forest managers actively listen to and act upon community concerns, rather than relying on formulaic approaches to engagement that largely involve one-way information provision (Hailey 2001; Shindler et al. 2002; Hammersley-Chambers & Beckley 2003; Creighton 2005).

The ability of forest managers, however, to satisfy stakeholder expectations and concerns varies, with some concerns being unrealistic within the commercial environment of forest management – for example the demand for the immediate cessation of forest harvesting operations. In circumstances with unrealistic expectations, forest managers can do little to satisfy stakeholder expectations, develop trust, and consequently achieve a SLO. In these cases, it is imperative that

forest managers balance the diversity of views and management priorities, “tensioning public interests and concerns against what is practicably achievable” (Bull et al. 2008, p. 711).

Operational CE based on personal interactions has been shown to help achieve a SLO from those directly involved in CE, but can these interactions influence the broader community? Our findings indicated that most forest management organisations focus their CE efforts on local community members which restricts the capacity for operational CE to influence the broader community. Discussions between forest managers and local stakeholders regarding forest management often “function well below the [broader] public’s attention” and consequently rarely impact wider public opinion (Parkins 2006, p. 200). The majority of stakeholders do not have direct contact with forest managers and therefore seek information regarding the industry from sources independent of the forest industry including the media and their friends. Stakeholders then base their judgements of legitimacy and hence their granting of a SLO on this information. Recognising this interaction, some forest managers feel that positive word of mouth enables good CE to achieve a SLO across a broader group of people beyond than those directly engaged:

*“If we’re doing business with a land owner or one neighbour, often that neighbour will reflect the concerns of a community. ... So, often we can address those issues and they can relate it [back] to the community. ... It’s effective because people listen to them rather than listening to us, which is strange but you tend to trust the people that you know better than, you know, a faceless company.” (TAS Forest Manager 6)*

The people directly involved in engagement processes often share information across their community. Some described how their positive CE experience led them to discuss their trust in a forest company with others:

*“Usually when they’re [forest managers] doing something, they’ll send a letter ... Well, one of us will get a letter and then the gazette goes round and*

*we go and talk to each other. I mean if only one person got a letter, that's enough for up here.” (TAS Community Member 3)*

*“If anybody asks me, or if anybody says [forest management company D] ‘are a bunch of wankers’, I will say now ‘No they are not, they are open to discussion’, because that has been my experience of them.” (TAS Community Member 1)*

The influence of engagement activities on the broader social networks of participants was also observed by Bull et al. (2008), with participation in CE processes found to have “directly affected participants’ behaviour and the behaviour of people they came into contact with” (Bull et al. 2008, p. 713). Participants in CE activities act as gatekeepers of information (Bull et al. 2008), providing an opportunity for community members to seek independent information on forest management activities, and subsequently form judgements as to the acceptability of these activities, and on the reputation of the forest management organisation.

There are, however, limitations to the extent that such experience can or will be shared by participating stakeholders. Community members who do not have contact with forest managers or engaged stakeholders will source their information regarding forest management from alternative sources, predominantly the media. In Australia over 85 percent of the population live in capital cities and learn about regional and rural issues through the media, from predominantly urban-based journalists who have little understanding of rural and regional life (Wahlquist 2003). When asked where her low level of trust in a forest management organisation had originated, one community member said:

*“Media, basically the media, because where else does it come from?” (TAS Community Member 1)*

Localised CE activities are rarely mentioned in the media, limiting the extent to which operational CE influences positive perceptions of forest management. As a “dramatic and economically important phenomena”, the forest industry attracts a

significant amount of media interest, resulting in the media becoming an important arena where the (il)legitimacy of forest management practices is constructed (Slovic et al. 2004; Vaara et al. 2006; in Siltaoja & Vehkaperä 2010, p. 497). The media, looking for conflict to create the drama and attract readers, can distort the perceptions on the severity of rural issues (Walquist 2003), including issues pertaining to forest management. Through the selection and framing of viewpoints and facts, the media can formulate the information that it portrays and consequently affect the creation and acceptance of social norms (Siltaoja & Vehkaperä 2010).

The importance of the media in shaping opinions about forestry presents significant challenges for the social acceptability and thus legitimacy of forest management practices. Some forest managers believed the media mostly reports negative messages about the industry, adversely impacting on their ability to achieve a SLO:

*“Forestry gets a lot of negative press, so suddenly they [general public] are thinking this is going to be the end of the world and they want to understand what that’s about, whether it is going to be the end of the world for them. So we’re coming from probably a poor position and we have to sell our case each time.” (TAS Forest Manager 6)*

The impact of the media is often entrenched due to the longevity of media information where there exists the possibility that “inaccurate information continues to be ‘consumed’ long after it has been shown to be false” (Baskerville 1995, p. 101). This is not to say that all media representations are false, nor that all members of the public would inevitably have positive impressions of forest managers and the forest industry if only accurate information was presented. The media is one of a number of information sources and individuals will seek and base their perceptions of the forest industry on the cumulative impact of this information and their personal experiences, preferences and choice (Kothari 2002). Therefore, while operational CE can influence the small numbers of people directly engaged, and to a lesser extent the people in their immediate

social circles, it has a limited influence on broader societal perceptions of the forest industry compared to the media.

### **(3) Does CE improve trust in the governance of the forest industry?**

The role of CE in satisfying the diverse demands of participants is further challenged by existing governance frameworks. Gunningham et al. (2004, p. 329) identified that external social, economic, and regulatory factors influence the attainment of a SLO and “often gain force through mutual interaction”. Forest management in both Tasmania and New Brunswick is governed by a complex mix of government and voluntary regulation and one of the challenges for achieving a SLO through operational CE is the limited influence such processes have on forest governance. With regulation setting, the purview of state/provincial legislatures and relevant government agencies (in Tasmania the Forest Practices Authority, and in New Brunswick the Department of Natural Resources), operational CE activities have little direct opportunity to influence forest governance:

*“Basically, the purpose of stakeholder committees in New Brunswick has been more at the operational level ... The objectives for the Crown forests, the public forests, are still pretty much the responsibility of government, and up until a few years ago they [the public] had basically very little input.” (NB Forest Manager 1)*

While some strategic level CE is typically undertaken in both case study regions, ranging from public submissions on proposed changes to forest management to the development of stakeholder committees to guide revisions of forest governance frameworks, strategic CE is typically undertaken separately to operational CE. As such, the insights developed through operational CE are not generally conveyed to the strategic level.

With many community members concerned about forest management beyond the operations occurring in their locality, issues relating to forest governance are often



raised during operational engagement processes despite the limited capacity of these processes to influence governance:

*“Yeah ... that’s the misconception, that we ... we are the people that set the guidelines or lower the standards ... They don’t know about the Forest Practices Authority.” (TAS Forest Manager 1)*

*“They say the licensees have control of the forest, they [licensees] define what happens in the forest and they really don’t ... their beef isn’t with the licensee it’s with the objectives that were defined by the provincial government.” (NB Academic 3)*

Resulting disillusionment with the forest industry therefore often reflects the inability of operational CE to influence forest management more broadly, rather than a simple lack of acceptance of local forest management practices. This highlights the importance of ensuring all participants have realistic expectations of operational CE. Unrealistic expectations can lead to lower willingness to grant a SLO, with engaged community members becoming disillusioned about the extent to which CE and forest managers addressed their key concerns.

#### **(4) Does CE keep up with changes in social expectations?**

Changing social norms, expectations and objectives can have significant impacts on judgments of acceptability and the SLO (Howe et al. 2005; Phillips & Johnson-Cramer 2006). Management practices perceived as legitimate at one point in time may not be legitimate at another time or in another place due to variations in norms across communities (Shindler et al. 2002; Deegan & Blomquist 2006). For example, some New Brunswick study participants discussed that the use of chemicals to control weed infestation or insect attack within forests was previously accepted by the public, however such practices are no longer supported due to concerns regarding the impact of chemicals within the environment. Therefore achieving and maintaining a SLO requires forest management

organisations to continuously adapting to changing stakeholder expectations (Luning 2011).

While this study did not purposefully evaluate the role of CE in promoting practice change, many forest managers spoke of the difficulties in responding to changing expectations. Implementing changes in expectations is often difficult due to the commercial environment of forest management and the long timeframes for achieving change in governance. These challenges often result in considerable delays before changes in social expectations are reflected in forest management practices, with stakeholders becoming disenchanted with their influence on forest management practices:

*“A lot of people go to those [advisory group meetings] with the expectation that they’re going to say something there that will actually change the course over the next five years, when in fact the earliest opportunity they would have to have any impact would be five years beyond that again. So that certainly does not meet their expectations time-wise.” (NB Forest manager 3)*

*“You know, there might be a lot of participation in Canada, but we don’t actually feel that the Government implements much of what they hear.” (NB Environmental group representative 1)*

Due to the personal, ongoing and interactive nature of operational CE, changes in social expectations are readily identified, providing an opportunity for forest managers to adapt local operational practices to reflect new social expectations. However, forest managers are often constrained in the extent to which they can change operational practices due to regulatory and commercial constraints associated with forest management (e.g. contractual obligations). In addition, the changes often require action beyond the local scale of operations which are difficult due to limited knowledge or scientific capacity to immediately realise new expectations; the often considerable social and economic impacts of rapid practice change; and the limited influence of localised engagement activities on the development and revision of governance frameworks. This means that while

operational CE can effectively identify and highlight changing social expectations, public disillusionment with the forest industry may continue when these changed expectations are not acted on rapidly.

### **Recommendations for strengthening the role of community engagement in achieving a SLO**

A SLO is achieved through the sequential and cumulative attainment of social legitimacy, management credibility, and trust (The social license to operate 2010). As the predominant form of communication used by forest management organisations to interact with stakeholders, operational CE needs to effectively facilitate the attainment of these social elements. Currently, operational CE practices have a limited capacity to achieve a broad acceptance of forest management practices, with restricted stakeholder representation reducing the opportunities for interactions of stakeholders across the continuum (Figure 1). While operational CE is effective at achieving micro social contracts, it fails to effectively move across the continuum to achieve contracts with stakeholders representing a broader level of society, despite there being some evidence of spread of positive reputation capital from individuals who have had good dealings with forest managers. Furthermore, low levels of trust in forest managers and forest management governance systems potentially deter stakeholders from forest management engagement processes. Operational CE doesn't include the appropriate mechanisms to facilitate the integration and development of broader scale social contracts, nor to effectively attract the range of stakeholders required. Measures taken to improve the role of CE in achieving a SLO therefore need to focus on overcoming these limitations.

### **Insights for future CE opportunities**

Despite the challenges facing operational CE, it has a unique role to play in facilitating the granting of a SLO, creating the space for the necessary two-way debate and discussion of forest management practices and policies, and thus

helping to incorporate meaningful input from stakeholders. As highlighted in the SLO continuum (Figure 1), operational CE can utilise the positive influence of reputation capital, and the movement of participants between social spaces (Joyce & Thompson 2000; Cornwall 2004; Hickey & Mohan 2004) to facilitate the cumulative gaining of micro SLO contracts, from the local to the regional and broader societal scale. A key challenge faced by forest managers in achieving a SLO is that of mistrust, often derived from previous negative experiences with forest managers, or the perceived illegitimacy of management practices and subsequent low levels of professional credibility (Singleton 2002; Shindler et al. 2002; Craig & Vanclay 2005; Brueckner et al. 2006). The principal strength of current operational CE techniques is their capacity to develop the trust that is critical to achieving legitimacy, public acceptability, and hence a SLO, albeit with stakeholders at the local level (Shindler et al. 2002; Brueckner et al. 2006). As found in this research and by others (see Joyce & Thompson 2000; Bull et al. 2008; Idemudia 2009), positive reputation capital can develop from successful CE experiences, influencing the development of trust and credibility with those stakeholders not directly involved in CE activities.

### **Informal approaches to CE**

It was well recognised in this study that current approaches to operational CE restricted the representation of all stakeholders. While a range of CE approaches are utilised to provide opportunities for engagement, more can be done to encourage the involvement of a broader range of stakeholders. Engagement activities should not be restricted to formal events or documentation such as advisory groups, letter notifications, or other common CE techniques listed previously (see Table 1). The informal spaces of everyday life are also important to consider, offering opportunities for discussion that are more natural for participants and creating personalised interactions important for the development of trust and social networks (e.g. the school bus stop, over the fence, the local market) (Hailey 2001; Cornwall 2004). By actively encouraging informal forms of communication such as casual community conversations, forest management organisations can begin to enjoy an ‘insider’s status’ which, through improved

communication across a range of stakeholders, can limit misunderstandings and help to reduce the costs of communication (see Idemudia 2009).

It is also important to actively include stakeholder groups in CE activities to reduce the risk of working only with elite individuals. Creating trust, legitimacy and credibility with groups as well as individuals helps to identify and manage community expectations which are often diverse across the range of stakeholders (Idemudia 2009). The positive effects of improved relationships with a greater range and number of stakeholders include more transparent decision-making, the consideration of a broader range of concerns and interests, and the potential for improved reputation capital within the community.

### **Using existing processes**

As discussed by Dare et al. (2011a), many forest management organisations design their CE practices to suit prevailing governance systems (including regulations and voluntary mechanisms such as forest certification standards). Compliance with such regulations often invokes a ‘tick the box mentality’, relying on a paper-trail audit system. However the importance of forest certification and other regulations that promote social aspects of forest management should be used as a catalyst for CE practice. The prescriptions surrounding CE requirements are often not detailed, enabling forest managers to experiment with CE tools and techniques, developing innovative ways that attract stakeholders to the engagement process and thus overcome low participation rates currently affecting the effectiveness of engagement activities. While some regulations may require formal communication arrangements (e.g. the letter notification in Tasmania and the advisory committee in New Brunswick), providing additional opportunities that create an interest in forest management activities and highlight the importance of the community to forest management organisation are important. For example, a New Brunswick forest management organisation runs an annual birdcount field trip attracting bird enthusiasts, local community members and forest managers, highlighting the importance of environmental stewardship practices undertaken by the organisation and encouraging casual interactions with forest management staff. Activities such as this not only work towards

certification compliance, but also broaden the stakeholder base with direct interaction with forest managers.

### **Political processes**

Recognising the limited potential for current operational CE approaches to attract a range of stakeholders and influence the broader strategic-based expectations of stakeholders, forest management organisations need to include alternative forms of CE that deliberately inform or influence forest governance systems. Currently such engagement techniques are restricted to public submissions and limited stakeholder advisory committee places. Influence on forest governance systems may require the use of more strategically-oriented engagement activities (e.g. surveys, state/provincial based committees), yet it is important to ensure that space exists within these processes for the work and learnings of operational CE activities to be included.

The highly-public outcomes of engagement processes highlight the need for government and/or forest management organisations to follow-through on proposed actions, provided feedback to stakeholders, and ensure a range of stakeholders are provided with an opportunity to participate, despite the scale of engagement. Broken promises undermine the efforts taken by participants at both operational and strategic levels of engagement in building trust and credibility and potentially foster continual conflict (Idemudia 2009). Decision-making processes that rely on elite representation, while often effective in terms of process logistics, does not encourage sufficient discussion and negotiation amongst the range of stakeholders, thus affecting the process legitimacy. More effort is required to consider the known pitfalls of policy development (e.g. structural inequalities, power relations) and adequately address the political environment that continues to treat social problems as technical ones (Luning 2011).

### **Media**

CE cannot reach everyone. Regardless of how enlarged and inclusive spaces of interaction become, there will always be members of the community who will be

left out, and/or choose to seek information about the forest industry largely through avenues other than CE, such as via the media. The significant influence of the media on the achievement of a SLO highlights the importance of developing positive working relationships with media representatives, which can help to increase constructive media coverage of operationally-based CE activities and other aspect of business management, and reduce negative reframing of forestry issues. Key media strengths may help to provide an efficient mechanism for forest managers to achieve both a local and a society-based SLO, including the ability to reach a large and diverse audience, and the perception of independence and credibility.

### **Communication of expectations and decision-making outcomes**

While current operational CE activities provide opportunities for changing expectations to be identified, the capacity for forest managers to effect broad-scale change is limited by unachievable social expectations. It is important to discuss participant expectations and the extent to which they can be met at the start of any CE process. It is equally important to ensure decision-making processes are open and transparent (Duinker 1998; Smith & McDonough 2001; Shindler et al. 2002). This may include providing written or verbal feedback to stakeholders detailing how the views and alternatives presented by stakeholders were considered during the decision-making process. In addition, it is important for forest managers to acknowledge the efforts of those involved in engagement activities, and openly commit to promises made to stakeholders, including reporting on progress against agreed targets, or providing evidence that agreed changes in management practice have been implemented.

Honest and open clarification of expectations about both the CE process and its outcomes provides an opportunity for unrealistic expectations to be discussed, current boundaries of influence acknowledged, and more appropriate forms of engagement identified that enable the realisation of linkages between engagement processes and positive changes in forest management. This helps to build trust in the process and amongst participants, reducing participant disillusionment and improving the likelihood of achieving a SLO.

This deliberate communication of engagement outcomes enables operational CE to play a more meaningful role in strategic planning and objective-setting processes, providing readily-available documentation detailing stakeholder concerns, negotiations, and agreed outcomes. Such documentation facilitates the deliberate consideration of key learnings from operational CE activities in strategic revision processes, and a more inclusive approach to the revision of regulations and policy governing forest management.

## **Conclusion**

Forest management organisations place considerable reliance on operational CE as a primary means of achieving a SLO. While the role of public involvement in achieving SLO is discussed in the literature, the specific role of operational CE is rarely discussed. Operational CE activities vary, ranging from small one-off conversations to long-term advisory committees. This paper does not attempt to provide a comprehensive overview of CE practice within the forest industry as this is well represented in the literature; instead we have focussed on the important role of operational CE in achieving a SLO within commercial forest management.

Using the case study examples, we have discerned key obstacles to the achievement of a SLO using operational CE, including limited stakeholder representation, low levels of existing trust, and the rigidity of existing forest management governance systems. These limitations are acknowledged by forest managers, yet there is little evidence that such factors are incorporated into corporate, or industry-based communication frameworks and other activities aimed at achieving a SLO. This paper provides an opportunity for forest managers and interested stakeholders to consider the factors that are inhibiting CE outcomes, providing practical recommendations to help improve the effectiveness of operational CE in achieving the multiple SLOs required across forest management activities.



When conducted appropriately, operational CE is effective in achieving a SLO with those directly engaged, and to some extent their social networks, however, as currently practiced, operational CE it is not an effective tool for achieving a SLO with the general public. Despite these limitations, there are opportunities to improve the influence of CE on SLO. More opportunities for the engagement of a broad representation of stakeholder in decision-making are required to obtain the legitimacy, management credibility, and trust necessary to achieve multiple SLOs across the scales of the SLO continuum. Current approaches to CE need to be reviewed and adapted, with new approaches implemented that include stakeholders from diverse geographic and interest areas, allowing for the inclusion of a broader range of values and priorities in decision-making. More transparency in decision-making is required, highlighting why decisions were made, how diverse viewpoints were considered, what changes have resulted from CE processes, as well as outlining the rationale behind what suggested changes could not be made. Forest managers need to adhere to promises made, and acknowledge the efforts of all involved in engagement activities. While a more open and transparent approach to forest management is needed to achieve a SLO, it will take time for such changes to be noticed and recognised as a positive move forward.

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## **Paper 5**

### **Handbook for operational community engagement within Australian plantation management**

Dare, M., Schirmer, J., and Vanclay, F (2011) *Handbook for Operational Community Engagement within Australian Plantation Management*. Cooperative Research Centre for Forestry, Hobart Tasmania.

The following handbook is a major output of the CRC for Forestry, and forms part of our funding requirements. The handbook was developed from research data and the literature. The handbook is not intended to be academic work, and thus it is written in a format best suiting an applied document which deliberately targets the key audience of forest managers. I have included the handbook in the thesis to highlight the positive contribution that this research has provided forest managers. I was the primary author of the majority of the handbook, except for section five ‘Conflict Resolution’ which was written entirely by Dr Schirmer. Prof Vanclay and Dr Schirmer contributed considerable effort over an extended time period in review and editing of the handbook

Note: The version of the handbook presented in this thesis is not the final version being produced for distribution. The final version is undergoing professional editing and design, a process which was not completed at the time of the thesis submission.



# Handbook for operational community engagement within Australian plantation forest management



*science for sustainable forest landscapes*

## **Authors**

Melanie (Lain) Dare  
Jacki Schirmer  
Frank Vanclay



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is a publication of **CRC Forestry Limited**

**Authors:**

Melanie (Lain) Dare<sup>1,4</sup>

Jacki Schirmer<sup>2,4</sup>

Frank Vanclay<sup>3,4</sup>

1. Tasmanian Institute of Agricultural Research (TIAR) , University of Tasmania

2. Fenner School of Environment and Society, Australian National University

3. Department of Cultural Geography, University of Groningen, The Netherlands (previously of TIAR)

4. Cooperative Research Centre for Forestry

**May 2011**

**Cooperative Research Centre for Forestry**

Private Bag 12

Hobart TASMANIA 7001

Phone: 03 6226 7947

Fax: 03 6226 7942

[www.crcforestry.com.au](http://www.crcforestry.com.au)

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## Conclusion

*(written for the thesis)*

This study had two purposes, firstly to develop a comprehensive understanding of community engagement (CE) practices undertaken within the Australian plantation forest industry, and secondly to use this understanding of CE to develop practical and realistic recommendations for improving CE within forest management. The need for improved CE practice within the forest industry stemmed from the ongoing contention surrounding forest management practices and policy, and increasing calls for more participatory forms of forest management decision-making (Florence 1993, Dargavel 1995, Bacon 1997 in Race & Buchy 1999). More recently there has been increasing social concerns regarding the expansion of the plantation estate across the predominantly agricultural Australian landscape (Schirmer 2002; Williams 2008; Williams et al. 2008). Suggestions have been made that the “plantation industry is less than responsible when it comes to neighbourhood relations” (Tonts & Schirmer 2005, p. 288), highlighting the importance of improved relationships and engagement amongst forest managers and local community members.

One challenge faced by the forest industry is the multiple roles attributed to CE including regulatory compliance, and the provision of operational and business benefits, importantly the achievement of a social license to operate. Therefore we need to understand whether the CE processes currently used within the forest industry are effective in satisfying the diversity of expectations, and what can the industry do to improve the effectiveness of their engagement processes. To explore these issues, the following primary and secondary research questions were developed.

Primary research question:

***How can the theory and practice of community engagement in Australian plantation forest management be improved?***

## Secondary research questions

1. *Why is community engagement important within Australian forest management?*
2. *What methods of community engagement are currently being practiced within Australia and internationally and what can the forest industry learn from others experiences?*
3. *How can improved understandings of underlying theoretical concepts help to advance CE practices?*

With much of the public participation literature ignoring the application of CE within commercial environments, this research helps to further both the discipline of public participation and forest management. The research reviews the practical application of CE using a critical lens that considers the socio-political context in which the CE processes are being implemented. As highlighted in Paper 1, the research has shown that forest managers are conducting a variety of CE processes, driven by social, political and commercially-based influences. An understanding of these drivers of engagement is important, providing essential contextual background and insights into the often implicit objectives of CE policies and practices. While regulatory compliance remains the predominant driver for operational CE within Australian forest management, there are constant interactions and interdependencies between the drivers for CE. These interactions affect the development and promotion of other drivers, further consolidating the need for CE within forest management. It is important to recognise that the demand for CE is more than simple regulatory compliance, or a means to reduce social conflict. For example, as described in Paper 3, a number of interrelated social and market drivers are creating demand for forest certification, of which CE is an important component. This highlights the influence of external pressures on the practice of forest management at the operational level, and thus the need for forest managers to remain vigilant in their efforts to understand and proactively manage for evolving social expectations (see Paper 4).

The review of current CE processes in Paper 1 shows that while CE processes are effective in meeting regulatory requirements for CE and achieving operational forest management goals, they are limited in their capacity to satisfy other



common CE goals such as achieving broader positive social change, and the attainment of a social license to operate (see Paper 4). Most CE techniques used by forest managers limit inclusivity and representation, both of which are key criteria for good participation. Forest managers favour personal approaches to operational CE, predominantly conducting face-to-face meetings with concerned neighbours or small groups (see Paper 2). This method of engagement is beneficial for forest managers and concerned neighbours, providing excellent opportunities to develop trust, respect and mutually acceptable outcomes, thus satisfying the regulatory, operational and perhaps forest certification expectations of CE. However, the narrow scope of this technique limits the effectiveness of CE to satisfy other drivers for engagement, especially the achievement of a social license to operate. The papers incorporated in this thesis encourage forest managers to think beyond the simple objectives and implementation of basic CE. Guiding forest managers to incorporate underpinning social theories into the design and implementation of CE, the research helps to improve the effectiveness of CE in terms of positive operational outcomes, improved community relations, and the accordingly the achievement of a social license to operate.

The research found that many forest managers who are charged with implementing CE activities have insufficient CE skills and training, and pay little attention to key social concepts of power, inclusivity, and trust. The lack of understanding, and application, of underpinning social concepts and theories restricts the capacity of forest managers to design and implement CE processes that encourage broader social and commercial objectives. Paper 2 provides an insight into the realities of current practice, describing the benefits that a greater understanding of underlying social concepts can offer current CE processes. Through my focus on operational engagement, I have provided realistic examples of the social context and operational constraints faced by forest managers, and how social theories and concepts can help transform their everyday social interactions.

Lessons learnt from the review of CE processes used both domestically and internationally (New Brunswick, Canada), highlight the pressure of internal and external influences on engagement success. Described in Paper 4, the potential for

operational CE processes to provide broader social benefits such as a social license to operate are restricted by the social context, prevailing governance frameworks, external political influences (e.g. media), and internal factors such as practitioner skill, and organisational culture as described in Paper 3. The use of New Brunswick as a comparative case study highlighted the similarities of forest management practices and forest manager ethos. Although the forests are managed under a vastly different commercial framework, their approaches to CE are relatively similar, and in both regions predominantly focused on localised forms of interaction. Lessons learnt in engagement practices in either region are therefore likely to be useful for other forest managers in different jurisdictions, as long as the influences of individual social and regulatory contexts are considered.

The accumulated knowledge and understanding built to answer the secondary questions helps to answer the primary research question: *How can the theory and practice of community engagement in Australian plantation forest management be improved?* With an understanding of what current CE processes are, what drives such processes to be implemented, and what influences the effectiveness of CE outcomes, it is possible to work towards making a positive contribution to the practice of CE within the Australian plantation forest industry, and thus to the discipline of forest management. In recognising the need for improved forest management skills in CE design and implementation, a handbook for CE within plantation forest management was developed using understandings and insights gained through this research and the relevant forest management and public participation literature. Provided as Paper 5, the handbook provides a comprehensive guide for forest managers conducting CE, incorporating practical and theoretical concepts that are important for effective CE within forest management. This handbook uses the learnings of the research to provide a tangible output for the forest industry, an accessible and focussed document that is deliberately designed to suit their needs. Australian operational forest managers will not read this thesis, nor are they likely to read the individual journal papers presented in this thesis. They are however likely to have access to the CE handbook. This handbook thus represents the answer to the primary research question – a source document that acknowledges the limited understanding that forest managers have regarding CE and therefore aims to share the extensive

learnings of this research and the literature to promote improved CE practices across the Australian forest industry.

## **Limitations**

While every effort was taken to ensure that the methodology and data analysis restricted the potential limitations associated with the research, there are some important limitations that need to be considered. Firstly, this research deliberately did not consider engagement processes conducted with Indigenous people. This decision was made early in the research process as the research team felt that the breadth of the research questions and the restrictions imposed by time and funding did not allow for the adequate consideration of Indigenous CE. Other researchers have undertaken work in conducting engagement with Australia's Indigenous communities, and while they have not concentrated on interactions with the forest industry, their work provides a useful contribution for forest managers (see, amongst other, Bauman & Smyth 2007; Carter 2010; Eversole 2003; Howitt 2001; Lane 2003; Lane & Williams 2008; Roughley & Williams 2007).

In any research project, the social context of the research is important. This project commenced in July 2006, during a period of rapid plantation expansion driven by funding available through managed investment schemes (MIS). MIS were highly scrutinised socially and politically, and received considerable media attention. Conducting social research in such an environment increases the potential for interviewees to be more defensive of their viewpoints, and perhaps less reflective of the broader social impacts. In an attempt to elicit more critical comment from interview respondents, time was spent at the beginning of the interview to develop rapport with respondents. This enabled the discussion to move beyond the current social, industry, and media rhetoric to what people are truly thinking and doing.

Since July 2006, the forest industry has changed considerably, primarily due to the global economic downturn and consequent impact on fibre markets. Several

large MIS companies have left the industry, with assets bought by both non-MIS and MIS organisations. Of the remaining MIS organisations, few are currently undertaking MIS-based establishment, which has resulted in a significant decline in new plantations being established over the past two years. Nevertheless, the value of this research is still considerable. Social concerns might not be as prominent, yet there still remains a pressing need for ongoing engagement to help the forest industry and the affected communities move forward through this transitional and consolidating phase of Australia's plantation forest industry.

The research was undertaken in two Australian regions where forest management is important. These regions are quite disparate in their social, political and regulatory context which assists the development of findings likely to be applicable beyond these regions. However, the limited number of interview participants included within the research is likely to limit the applicability of some research outcomes. The research participants (65 interviewees and approximately 120 workshop participants) only represent a small number of forest managers, or affected and interested community members. Time and funding pressures, and a lack of interest from contacted representatives, resulted in little representation of the views of government or NGOs in the research. Subsequent research into CE within the forest industry being conducted by researchers at the Cooperative Research Centre for Forestry will address some of these limitations.

The deliberate focus on operational CE practices, and the breadth of the research questions, prohibited an in-depth analysis of all relevant bodies of literature and schools of thought related to CE. Encompassing the disciplines of both forest management and public participation, the research presented several opportunities to further explore important social theories including justice theory, power and conflict. However, due to pressures of time and space, such theories are not comprehensively incorporated into this thesis, rather their importance is noted and further research invited.

## **Recommendations and future research**

Forest managers need to embrace the opportunities for improved CE practice and experiment with different forms of engagement that may satisfy regulatory, social and commercial objectives. Using multiple approaches to engagement, forest managers can ensure compliance with regulations and certification standards, as well as achieve more positive social interactions between local communities and the forest industry through transparency, approachability, and inclusivity. By using a greater variety of CE techniques than are currently typically considered, forest managers can encourage a more diverse range of interested and affected stakeholders to participate. This facilitates spaces for interaction that help to overcome previous negative perceptions of the forest industry, develop positive personal relationships, and share the diverse knowledge and values that exist within the broader community.

It is only through the proactive development and evolution of CE processes that we can ensure the findings and recommendations of this research result in improved CE practices. It is therefore important for social researchers to maintain their links with industry, encouraging additional exploration and critical review of CE practices as they emerge and evolve. Through ongoing links with industry, social researchers can further contribute to the discipline of forest management, providing ongoing and timely advice on matters as they arise, rather than as critical reviews when social concerns reach breaking point. It is important to remember that it takes time to develop the necessary relationships between forest managers and social researchers. Therefore social researchers need to keep open the lines of communication developed through research such as this study. Good relationships based on mutual trust and respect can encourage and facilitate ongoing dialogue and understandings of the dynamic commercial context and emerging social concerns, thus allows information to be shared and solutions developed effectively and efficiently.

In addition to keeping open these lines of communication, this research has highlighted several areas of research that may help to understand better the dynamic and evolving relationships between forest management and society. Within this thesis, Paper 4 has described the complexity of the concept of a social license to operate. This paper discusses the limited effectiveness of CE to achieve a social license to operate due to other social and political influences. This paper is only the start of this discussion, with more work required to help forest managers truly understand what they, and the industry as a whole, need to do to achieve and subsequently maintain a social license to operate. CE is only one tool, and a relatively blunt tool at that. Research is required to deliberately target the complex construct of a social license, including the key factors involved in making and retaining positive judgements of forest management acceptability and exploration of the links between the various levels of social license.

Another important aspect of forest management is tenure. The Australian plantation sector is primarily privately owned. Most literature examining the social aspects of forest management is based on the management of publicly owned native forests. We know very little about the distinctions made by the public regarding the acceptability of private versus public forest management, for example, whether the public sees private forests as being different to public forests, or perceives industrial private forest managers differently to private landowners. Some work has been undertaken with regard to this question in the United Kingdom (see Carter et al. 2009), yet we know little about such distinctions in Australia. Understanding these perceptions can help forest managers and policy-makers develop forest management policies and processes to better suit social expectations, focusing resources on key management activities rather than applying unnecessary or ill-advised protocols across all management contexts.

## **Conclusion**

Through this study, I have comprehensively reviewed the current CE practices undertaken by forest managers, making a critical comparison against the somewhat limited public participation literature which does not provide sufficient guidance and recognition of public participation practices undertaken in commercial environments. Through this critical review, I have identified the key drivers for engagement within the Australian forest industry, and used this understanding to appreciate operational constraints that inhibit some forms of CE. With this improved understanding of operational CE, a holistic approach to engagement that incorporates practical realities and the benefits of underpinning social theories and concepts has been developed. In recognition that current CE practice is limited by forest manager skills and understandings of social theories, I have provided realistic and relevant guidance that encourages the inclusion of social theories in an effective and accessible manner.

The forest industry has undergone significant change over the past few years, however the industry is evolving to suit the prevailing social, economic and political situations. The improved CE practices recommended from this research enables forest managers to work proactively with communities affected by the changing industry. Through continual application, experimentation, and reflection on CE processes, forest managers and the community members they are working with will have the opportunity to learn, adapt, and grow together. This is beneficial for all, creating a stronger industry and stronger communities.

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